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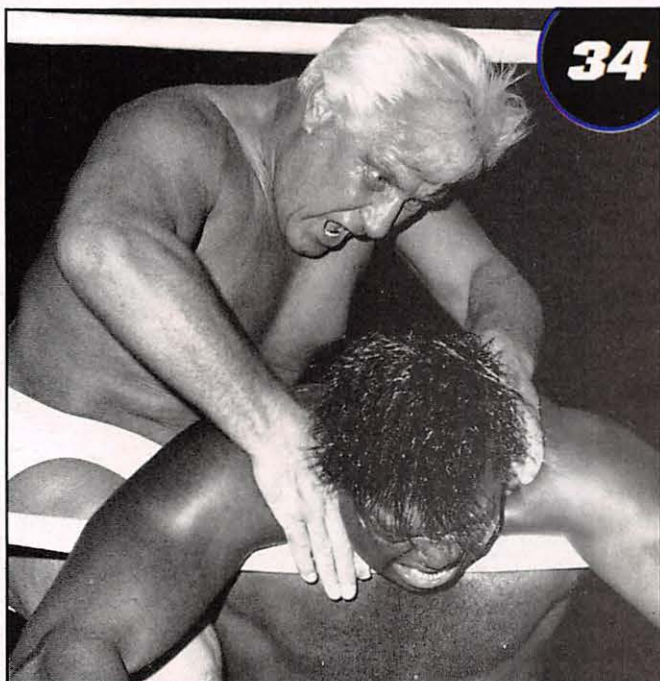
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FEATURES



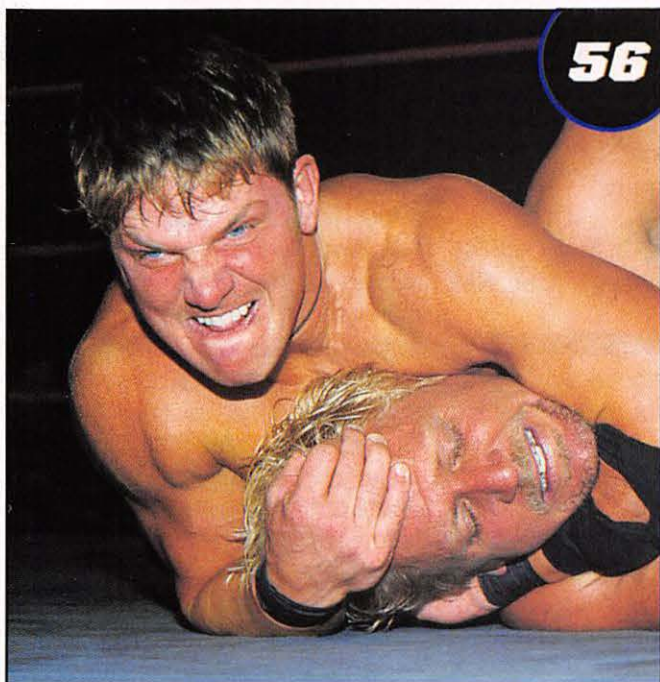
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Jazz-Trish Stratus by Gary Dineen/Winning Image

COVER DESIGN:

Natalie Burke

your letters

GOLDBERG HITS ROADBLOCKS

After reading your 12-page section on Bill Goldberg in the September 2003 issue ("Goldberg's Golden Road To WWE"), I was surprised by your rosy outlook concerning his career. The facts you include speak for themselves: He doesn't like the wrestling business, he's injury-prone, he's moody behind the scenes, and he's already made a fortune without having to do very much for it. Are these the ingredients that go into a consistent main-eventer in WWE?

Vince McMahon's signing of Goldberg, and your optimistic view that he could change his ways, seem like blind faith to me. Consider his track record during his first three months as a member of the Raw roster. He has already had a backstage altercation with Chris Jericho, he is already griping about the number of dates he

must work, and, no surprise to me, Linda McMahon has already admitted Goldberg has had a "disappointing" run. The WWE creative team is wisely de-emphasizing Goldberg, possibly even taking him off track from a SummerSlam showdown with Raw champion Triple-H, and putting him in more appropriate angles, such as Rodney Mack's "White Boy Challenge."

It all reminds me of a quote you included in your section. In 1998, Goldberg told *THE WRESTLER* that if other people didn't meet his high standard of candor and politeness, then he would "bring down the wrath of God on them."

Yeah, WWE really needs that around.

BOB WOOFER

Truth or Consequences, NM

ROCK FOR PRESIDENT!

I completely agree with Will Welsh's assessment of The Rock's potential to surpass Arnold Schwarzenegger in Hollywood ("No Holds Barred," September 2003). As Welsh stated, The Rock has already done his share of acting and stunt work while in pro wrestling, and Hollywood producers are grooming him for starring roles already. No, The Rock hasn't had to humiliate himself with anything like *Hercules In New York*.

But judging from what I'm hearing on the news lately, maybe The Rock ought to forego his acting career and jump straight into politics. Welsh cited The Rock's elegant speech at the



The Rock has a great chance to become a bigger Hollywood star than Arnold Schwarzenegger, writes Heather Hallstrom, who suggests he also consider a career in politics.

2000 Republican National Convention, and I happen to remember his spirited debate with Brent Bozell III of the Parents Television Council while at the event. Schwarzenegger thinks he can terminate Gray Davis and become a governor, just like his friend Jesse Ventura. Wouldn't Californians prefer a witty, handsome governor like The Rock? If The Rock doesn't have a home in California already, it *doesn't* matter. The Rock could win any state-house in the country.

Better yet, why doesn't The Rock aim higher? Even the mighty Arnold cannot aspire to become President, because he was born in Austria. The Rock, however, could have what it takes to sit in the White House someday. After all, it is the people's house.

HEATHER HALLSTROM
Encino, CA



Our look at Goldberg's "golden road" to WWE (September 2003 issue) portrayed "Da Man" in too positive a light, according to reader Bob Woofier.

WHERE IS CHYNA?

Joanie Laurer has been gone from WWE since June 2001, and I think it's about time that Vince McMahon invites "The Ninth Wonder Of The World" back into his company. He would discover that Chyna is an even better fit in WWE now than she was a few years ago. That's because WWE divas are competing more aggressively now, most notably Trish Stratus, Jazz, and Victoria.

Of course, it would be nice if Joanie returned with her more natural look, without the raven-dyed hair and black leather outfits. If fans thought the match between then-women's champ Chyna and Lita was good at Judgment Day 2001, they would be amazed at how Chyna could energize Raw's ladies division today. Unlike the other returning stars to WWE, she wouldn't seem like a nostalgia act.

Here's my idea for her comeback: WWE should invite Joey Buttafuoco to Raw as a special guest, and give Chyna a chance to avenge her loss to that sweaty garage mechanic on Fox's *Celebrity Boxing* by giving him the pummeling of his life. To paraphrase Chyna's entrance theme, don't treat her like a woman, don't treat her like a man, don't treat her like you know her, treat her for just who and what she is.

I have so much faith in Joanie that she's in my prayers every night. Come on, Vince, bring back Chyna!

SPEC. ANTHONY WASHINGTON
U.S. ARMY
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KUDOS TO SANDMAN

I would like to offer my extreme congratulations to The Sandman for winning NWA-TNA's Hard 10 Tournament on July 2. The Sandman showed pretenders like Mike Sanders and playas like New Jack that he's the only hardcore icon in this business.

Everyone thought The Sandman's career was finished when a joker like Pogo the Clown beat the hell out of him in XPW. It's obvious to me that XPW promoters were just using him

to exploit ECW so they could elevate their own stars.

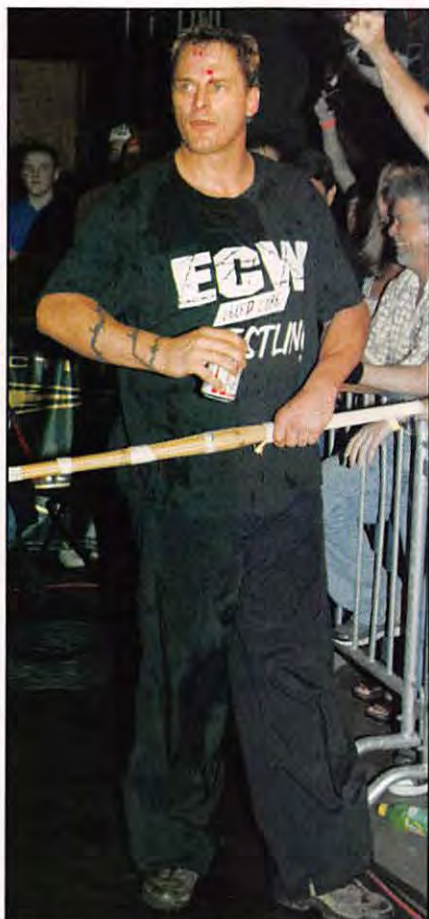
I hope this will lead TNA to establish a hardcore championship. It's unfortunate that WWE and WCW's lame attempts in recent years gave hardcore a bad name. With its pay-per-view format, away from program censors, TNA has an opportunity to do hardcore right, just as it was done in ECW.

HENRY SMITH
Philadelphia, PA

DON'T WAIT UNTIL TOO LATE

We loved your feature on The Sheik in the July 2003 issue of *THE WRESTLER* ("The Sheik-1926-2003: The Original Hardcore Icon"). But it is a shame that wrestling's greats don't gain their proper recognition until they die. *THE WRESTLER* should fea-

(Continued on page 76)



Just when so many fans thought his career was dead, The Sandman won NWA-TNA's Hard 10 Tournament this summer. Henry Smith was happy to see that and hopes to see more hardcore action in TNA.

Wrestler



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what's happening?

By Dan Murphy

ONE-LEGGED PHENOM **Zach Gowen** has a WWE contract, and he won it without the aid of his benefactor, **Hulk "Mr. America" Hogan**.

At the July 1 taping of *Smackdown*, WWE chairman **Vince McMahon** forced Gowen to team with Smackdown General Manager **Stephanie McMahon** in a handicap match against **The Big Show**, with Gowen's WWE contract hanging in the balance. Show had his way with Gowen and Stephanie, but even after he ripped off Gowen's prosthetic leg, the tenacious 20 year old kept coming, hopping after Show and firing desperate punches at the big man.

When Vince exhorted Show to choke-slam Stephanie to the floor, **Kurt Angle** and **Brock Lesnar** ran in to make the save. Gowen managed to dropkick a chair out of

Show's hands and into his face, leaving the massive one open for an Angle slam from Angle and an F5 from Lesnar. Then, in one of the most remarkable moments in WWE history, Gowen hopped up to the top rope and executed a stunning moonsault onto Show to score the upset pin.

"I'm telling you, that was one of the most incredible things I've ever seen in wrestling," color commentator **Tazz** said after the match. "I literally have goosebumps right now. I'm very proud of that kid."

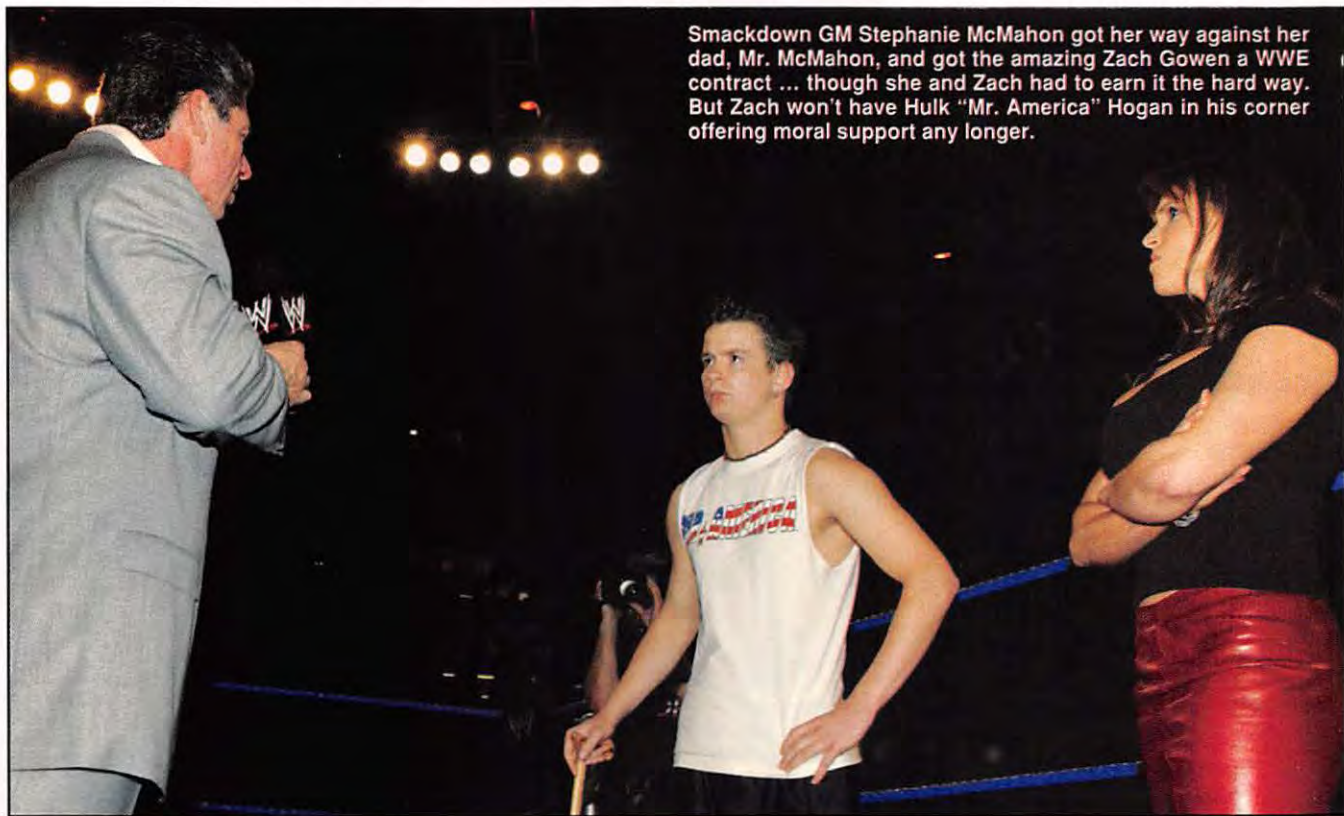
Gowen had lost his leg to cancer as a child. Now he has achieved his boyhood dream of wrestling for WWE.

Unfortunately, Gowen's hero, Hulk Hogan, wasn't there to share the moment. Days earlier, Hogan announced on **Bubba the Love**

Sponge's Florida radio show that his character is done with WWE and that the masked Mr. America is "on hiatus." Hogan hinted he was again unhappy with the creative direction of the promotion and said he would like to work some matches in Japan. Hogan has used this radio show to further storylines in the past, and at press time, it was unclear as to whether or not he truly is finished with WWE.

One person who *is* finished with WWE is **"Rowdy" Roddy Piper**. Piper continued his bizarre behavior of recent months by appearing on the HBO's *Real Sports* and criticizing both wrestling as a whole and WWE for failing to enforce drug testing and recklessly allowing wrestlers to get injured or damage their bodies through substance abuse. Piper even said he couldn't watch himself

Smackdown GM Stephanie McMahon got her way against her dad, Mr. McMahon, and got the amazing Zach Gowen a WWE contract ... though she and Zach had to earn it the hard way. But Zach won't have Hulk "Mr. America" Hogan in his corner offering moral support any longer.



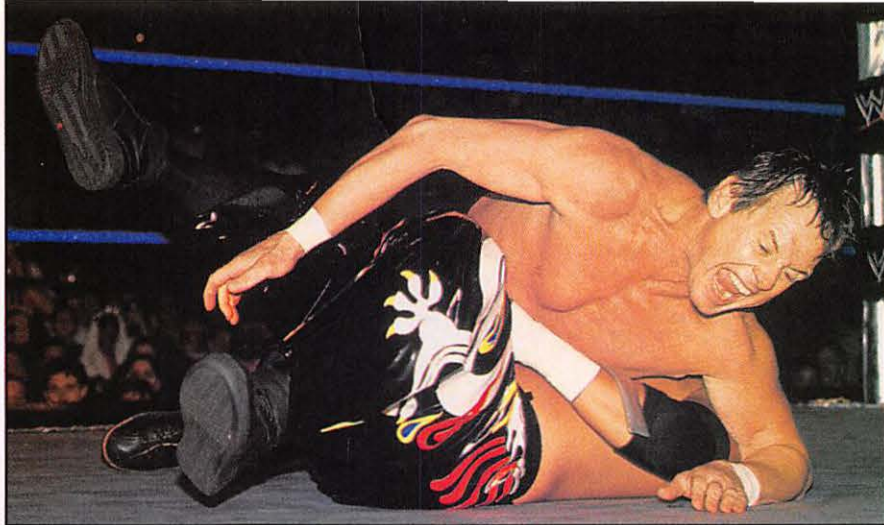
on TV because he was disgusted with himself for coming back to WWE.

Vince McMahon appeared on the same program and raised eyebrows when he tried to bully interviewer **Armen Keteyian** and swatted at the notes in Keteyian's hands. McMahon released Piper within days of the episode's airing, soon after he and **Sean O'Haire** lost a tag team title match to **Eddie Guerrero** and **Tajiri** at a *Smackdown* taping in Madison Square Garden. Rumor has it that **Brother Love**, who replaced Piper on several house shows as an interviewer in the days following his firing, might return on a more regular basis to take Piper's place as manager of **Sean O'Haire**.

In other WWE news, sources close to **Kane** say his recent unmasking has done little to improve his attitude. "I've never seen the guy this angry," one locker room source said. "I think he's right at the breaking point, and I think a lot of people are going to be surprised at how much damage he could do if that ticking time bomb goes off. I don't think anyone would be safe."

Apparently, **Triple-H** likes what he sees in **Mark Jindrak**. With **Batista** still on the injured list, "The Game" was reportedly scouting the former WCW tag champion and strongly considering him for the role of the new enforcer in **Evolution**. Reportedly, **Randy Orton** (who competed with Jindrak in Ohio Valley Wrestling) suggested the move, and Triple-H seemed ready to pull the trigger at press time. However, word is **Ric Flair** has not been happy with the idea. Flair still sees Batista as the next Brock Lesnar, and he's in no hurry to get on Batista's bad side.

"Jindrak is a promising kid, but Batista is a monster in the making," a locker room source said. "Flair's been trying to get that point across to Hunter, but Hunter's head is so big that he's ignoring Flair's advice. As for Batista, word is that he's none too happy that they've decided to replace him at all. It's not like he isn't planning to return in a few months."



Never say never, but it looks like Roddy Piper wrestled his last WWE match when he and Sean O'Haire battled Eddie Guerrero and Tajiri on *Smackdown* on June 24. WWE had little choice but to release him after he made some startling remarks on HBO's *Real Sports*.

WWE has announced Summer-Slam 2004 will be held in SkyDome in Toronto ... While **Mick Foley's** debut novel, *Tietam Brown*, is sell-

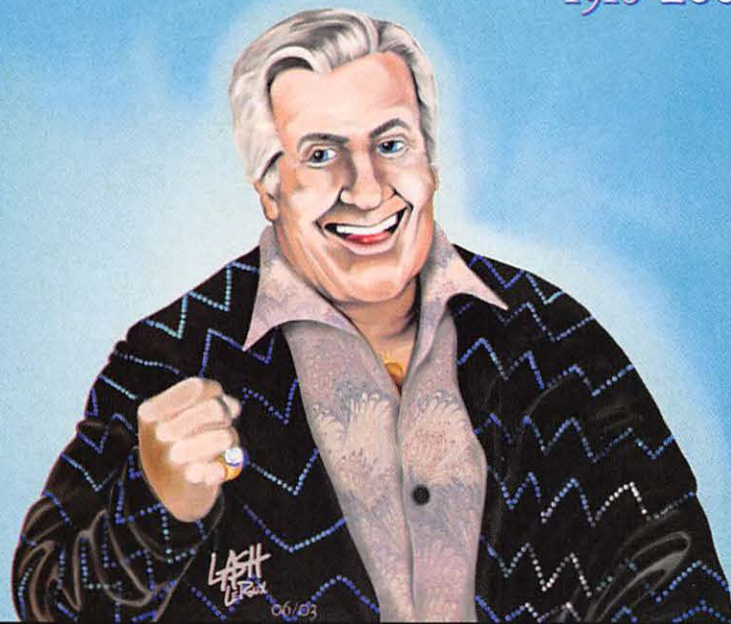
ing pretty well, **Lita's** autobiography is scheduled for release on September 16, followed by **Steve Austin's**

(Continued on page 78)

"LASHING OUT!" By Lash LeRoux

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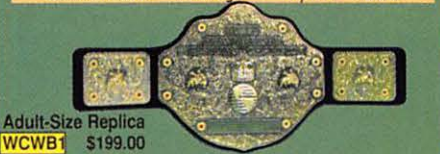
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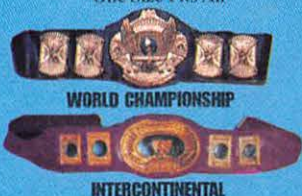
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With Will Welsh

VINCE McMAHON DOESN'T like WWE to look vulnerable. He's afraid of it. That's probably why, as the promotion's most recognizable face, he's made himself into a more physically intimidating specimen than most of the men on his roster—despite being almost 60 years old. That's why, when he's forced to answer a tough question (as he was on HBO's *Real Sports* program in June), he unleashes an answer that isn't really an answer at all, but a threatening response daring the unlucky interviewer to even *think* about posing the question a second

time. That's why he'll gladly look foolish if it'll help drive storylines, but he'll attempt to cut the legs out from under anybody who makes him look foolish at any other time.

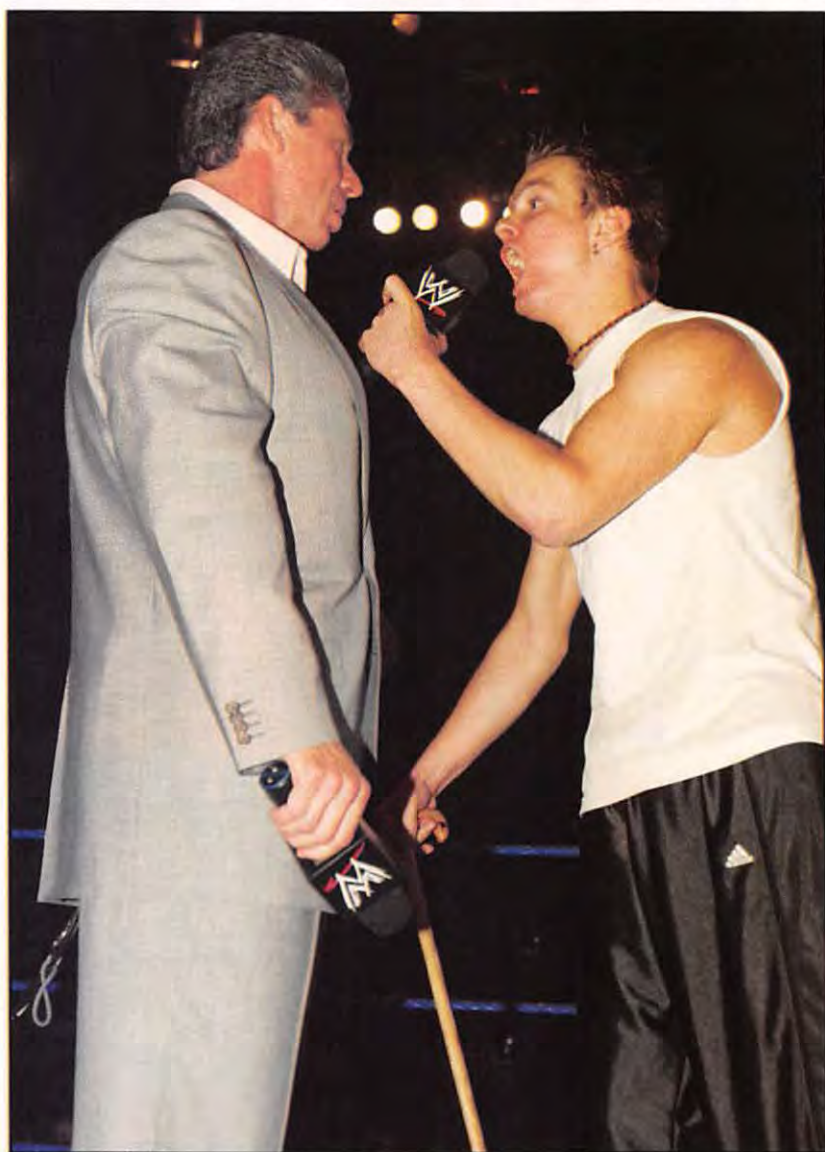
Very recently, WWE introduced us to Zach Gowen, a brave young man who tragically lost a leg to cancer at age eight. Almost as soon as he debuted, his partnership with Mr. America and feud with Vince McMahon became one of the Smackdown brand's main storylines. Smackdown General Manager Stephanie McMahon quickly began trying to get Gowen signed to a WWE contract, but for the longest time, most of WWE's audience wasn't sure why. For all we knew, Stephanie's offer could have been based in nothing more than charity.

However, there were a few of us out there who knew better. Gowen might not have wrestled a WWE match at the time Stephanie began throwing around the idea of signing him to a WWE contract, but he had wrestled before—and quite well. Just before appearing on WWE TV, Gowen made a few appearances for NWA-TNA under the name Tenacious Z—and from the moment he debuted for the promotion, he had the fans in awe. Before Gowen came along, hardly anyone had ever heard of a one-legged wrestler—let alone a one-legged wrestler who could perform ridiculous aerial maneuvers and actually compete with wrestlers lucky enough to have two legs underneath them. Gowen even got a win against five-time former WWE World tag team champion B.G. James (the former Road Dogg).

Yes, Stephanie knew exactly what she was doing.

So did Vince, even if he has portrayed himself to be the angry ogre who refused to give the skinny one-legged kid a break. See, when Vince looks at Gowen, he sees money. In fact, he sees big money. After all, what wrestling fan wouldn't want to go out and spend some of his or her hard-earned dollars to see a one-legged wrestler perform a flawless moonsault against an unsuspecting opponent on the outside? Who doesn't want to see him tag into a tag team match by hopping onto the top rope and delivering a missile dropkick with pinpoint precision? I actually went to an online file-sharing service and downloaded a couple of his

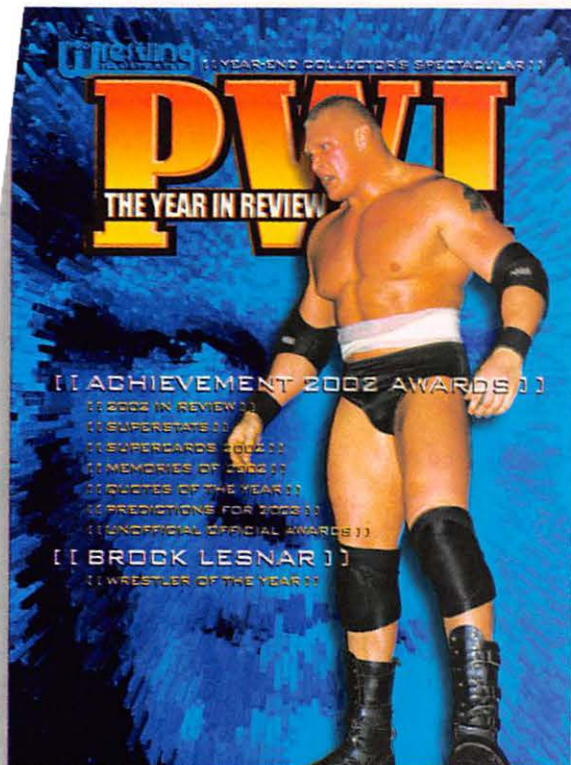
(Continued on page 80)



Vince McMahon has been convinced that Zach Gowen can be a strong asset to his company in a number of ways. Yet has he considered what Gowen offers to WWE in the long term?

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blindsided

By Harry Burkett

RODDY PIPER INFURIATED the WWE powers-that-be with his comments on the June 24 edition of *Real Sports*, an investigative program on HBO that on that night examined the rash of premature deaths in pro wrestling over the past decade. Vince McMahon, who was also interviewed for the show, vehemently denied that WWE played a role in those deaths, stating that such individuals had made poor lifestyle choices. Indeed, very few of those athletes had died while on the active WWE roster. Unfortunately, McMahon spent more time trying to intimidate interviewer Armen Keteyian than using facts to support his case.

On the other hand, Piper has been very critical of McMahon and other promoters over the years, particularly in his recent autobiography, *In The Pit With Piper*. He blamed Vince Russo for Owen Hart's death during an appearance in NWA-TNA. He was just as critical on *Real Sports*, discussing how injuries and unrelenting schedules sent him into a cycle of drug dependence that lasted for decades. Piper said that promoters' indifference, or their unspoken approval of such behavior, is what has led to so many premature deaths. Said Piper: "They all died young and nobody cares about it ... They take them and they screw them up so much, they being the rash of promoters I've gone through in my 33 years."



It didn't take long for Piper to start criticizing WWE again once he rejoined the company. He wasn't happy with the new "Piper's Pit." Once he made his appearance on HBO's *Real Sports*, his fate was sealed. It's hard to figure out which "side" to take on this difficult and complex issue.

McMahon had a different view: "If you can't cut it, get out. What's wrong with that? It's no different than any other business, by the way. If, for some reason, you have to rely on illegal drug usage to make it, you're going to self-destruct."

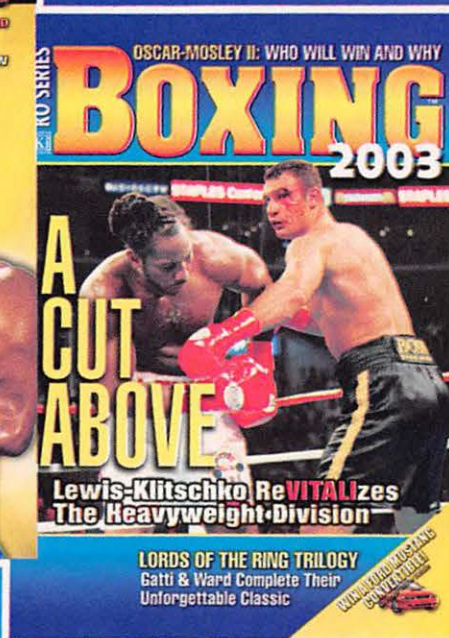
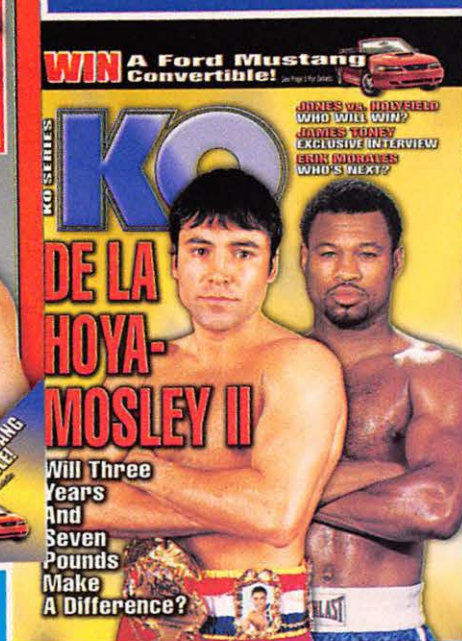
Aside from this basic philosophical disagreement, McMahon had to be even more offended that Piper opted to air his grievances in public. This, most likely, is what led WWE to release Piper from his obligations the following day. And one could argue that McMahon was correct in forcing Piper out of a company that he obviously didn't respect. Before his *Real Sports* appearance, Piper had publicly criticized WWE for not giving him enough creative latitude since his return in April. He went so far as to say that his "Piper's Pit" segments had "sucked." So why should WWE reward Piper's outspoken discontent with more paychecks?

Again, even though McMahon and WWE might have seized the moral high ground, they decided to take the low road. Fortunately for WWE executives, who had been negotiating a contract with Piper since March 31, they had not yet reached a deal that would have ensured his services until August. The company released a statement announcing that it would cease contract negotiations. Although WWE had good reason to terminate "Hot Rod,"

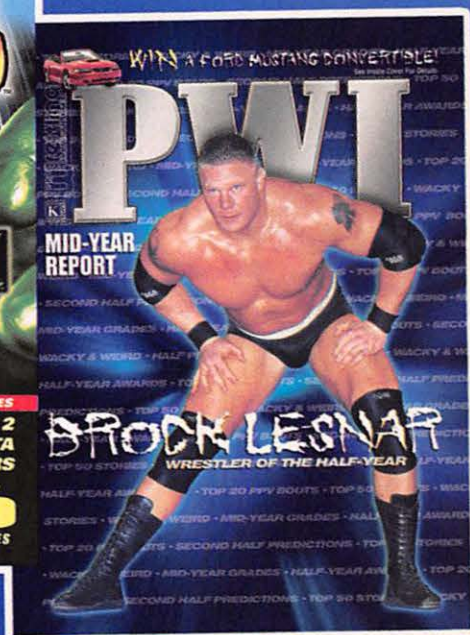
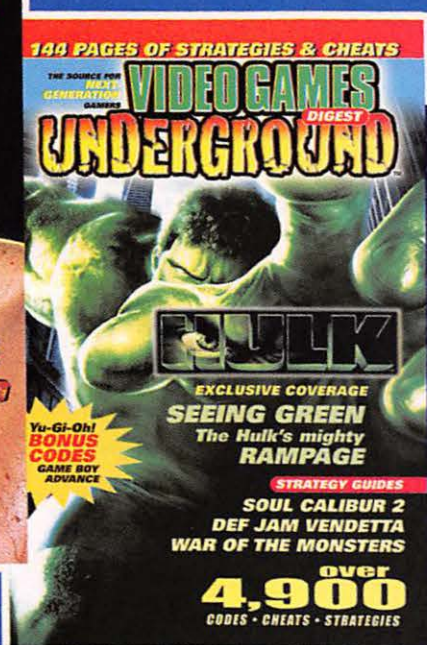
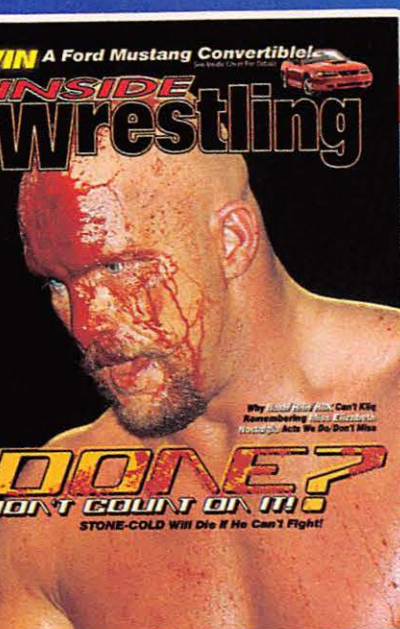
its statement illustrated some of the smug indifference that Piper was talking about.

The statement read as follows: "On Tuesday, June 24, Piper appeared on an HBO program and revealed disturbing facts about his own personal drug use. Piper stated that he used drugs for many years while working in professional wrestling and that he does not like the person that he becomes when he actively performs as a professional wrestler."

"In view of WWE's inability to reach agreement on a contract and
(Continued on page 81)



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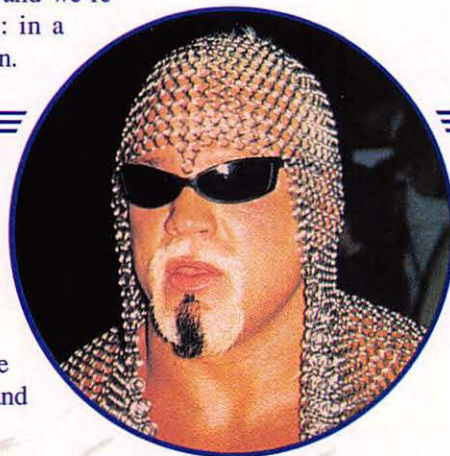


thumbs up



Thumbs Up to Sting. Over the years, Sting took an awful lot of criticism from wrestling experts who questioned his enthusiasm for the sport that made him so rich and famous. Well, here's hoping that all those critics will now permanently shut their mouths. Sting's recent debut for NWA-TNA reminded us of the passion he has always brought to the sport and left us pining for the days of *WCW Monday Nitro* (okay, the heyday of that show at least). Although there have been many imitators, wrestling has only ever known one Sting, and we're excited that he's back where he belongs: in a wrestling ring. Let's hope he makes it a habit again.

Thumbs Up to Scott Steiner. Ever since Scotty Steiner cut his hair, dyed it blond, and began calling himself "Big Poppa Pump," he's been one of our favorites, because we never quite know what he is going to do or say next. So imagine our surprise when he started acting like (surprise!) a gentleman—or as close to acting like a gentleman as a man with the nickname "Freakzilla" can act—and came to the defense of the beautiful Stacy Keibler when she ran into trouble with Test. Steiner might be a little crazy, but at least he's showing us that he has a good heart. The partnership between Scott and Stacy could work out well for both of them.



Thumbs Up to Stephanie McMahon. It takes a lot of guts to stand up to Vince McMahon—and it might take even more guts to stand up to him when he's your father. Not only has Stephanie fought her dad on numerous major decisions, she has refused to back down despite his desperate and cowardly attempts at intimidation. In fact, Steph's admirable resolve to get Zach Gowen signed to a Smackdown contract in spite of Vince's interference has proven that she's become so much more than Daddy's spoiled little girl—she's a woman who is quite ready to handle managing WWE once her father retires.



Thumbs Up to Kurt Angle. After nearly four years of booing Kurt Angle virtually nonstop, we're finally ready to give the former Olympian a much-deserved "Thumbs Up." He's been one of the greatest wrestlers in the world for quite some time, but ever since returning from neck surgery, Angle has been acting like a different person. He's been honest with himself, his fellow wrestlers, and the fans—and that's really all anybody can ask for. However, we're going to keep a close eye on him, because as he has shown in the past, he'll turn against us when we least expect it. Still, we *think* things will be different this time.



thumbs down



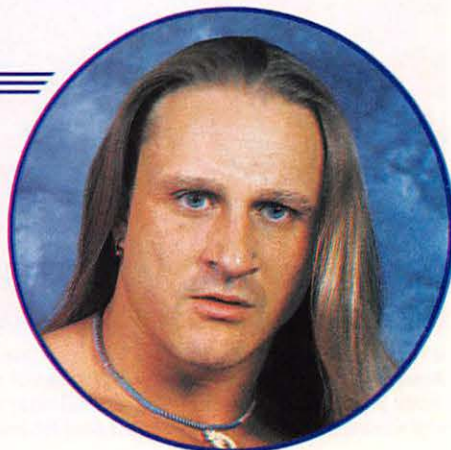
Thumbs Down to Sable. Who in the heck does Sable think she is? Just because Vince McMahon has taken a creepy liking to her doesn't mean that she rules Smackdown's roost. (In case she hasn't noticed, the door to the Smackdown general manager's office still reads "Stephanie McMahon.") Sable needs to realize that she's nothing more than a chess piece that Vince won't hesitate to sacrifice if he senses a chance at checkmate. We thought that she had learned that lesson years ago, but apparently we were wrong. For her sake, we hope she learns it very soon.

Thumbs Down to Shane Douglas. There was a point in Shane Douglas' career at which we thought he was one of the very best in the business. Unfortunately, he's no longer at that point in his career. Douglas' debut for NWA-TNA, while intriguing, left us scratching our heads. Why is he so proud of himself? Does he really think he's some kind of wrestling mastermind? After all, anybody from Raven's past could have snuck up on him and attacked him without warning to jump-start a career. It's not exactly original thinking. Couldn't he come up with a better agenda at the outset of his TNA career?



Thumbs Down to Theodore Long. Even before Teddy, *er*, Theodore Long played the race card the very first time, he knew he was going to get criticized for it. In fact, he was actually banking on it. Why else would he have created the ridiculous "White Boy Challenge," perhaps the most ridiculous challenge issued in WWE's recent history? Are we supposed to be impressed when Rodney Mack makes easy work of some guy who looks like he was just pulled off the street? If Mack really wants to see his career take off, he'll wrestle quality opponents of all races and forget about playing the race card.

Thumbs Down to Kid Kash. Okay, we know that Kid Kash doesn't have a problem treating women like men (in his case, that usually means his former TNA valet, the lovely Trinity) when they're in a wrestling ring with him and, to a certain extent, that's forgivable. What's not forgivable, however, is his sickening approach to the whole subject of male-on-female violence. At NWA-TNA's one-year anniversary show, Kash spouted off the following insensitive line: "When I think about beating women, I get goosebumps all over my body." Somebody needs to shut this jerk up—and in a hurry.



correspondents reports

Nashville, TN: NWA Total Nonstop Action Correspondent: Mindy McDermott

There were a few questions going into the main event of NWA-TNA's first anniversary show, which would be pitting Sting and Jeff Jarrett against new NWA heavyweight champion A.J. Styles and his special partner, Syxx-Pac. Would Sting make the same impact, both in the ring and with the crowd, in his first North American appearance in more than two years? Would he be able to co-exist with Jeff Jarrett, to whom he lost the World Wrestling All-Stars championship in a heated NWA-WWA title unification match held in New Zealand



It had been more than two years since Sting competed in North America before he made his NWA-TNA debut in a tag team match in June. A.J. Styles found out that the "Stinger's" scorpion deathlock still works, as Sting and Jeff Jarrett beat Styles and Syxx-Pac.

only three weeks earlier? Lastly, would this whet Sting's appetite to compete in TNA on a regular basis, or persuade him to finally sign with WWE?

Fortunately, Sting had whipped himself into good shape and seemed more energetic on this night at the Fairgrounds Coliseum than at any point during his final two years in WCW. In fact, Sting might have been over-anxious, going for the scorpion deathlock too early, enabling Styles to trap him in his own hold for a while. He rebounded, though, by pouncing on the NWA champion with several Stinger splashes in the corner. He took out both opponents simultaneously with a DDT to Styles and a scorpion deathdrop to Syxx-Pac. The referee was knocked down in the chaos.

At that point, Jarrett executed the stroke on Styles, but Vince Russo ran into the ring and hit him with a bat. Raven emerged to counter Russo, and then Shane Douglas intercepted Raven. When the referee recovered, Jarrett used a second stroke to score a pinfall over the man who had just beaten him for the NWA gold. When Russo and Douglas were finally driven from the ring, Jarrett and Raven started brawling. But Sting, ever the positive influence, separated them and held up their arms in victory.

In other bouts: NWA tag team champions Christopher Daniels & Elix Skipper beat Chris Harris & James Storm ... Kenzo Suzuki wrestled Perry Saturn to a no-contest ... Justin Credible pinned Jerry Lynn ... New Jack beat Mike Sanders in a Hard 10 Tournament semi-final match ... NWA-TNA X champion Chris Sabin defeated Paul London ... D-Lo Brown, Frankie Kazarian, & The Sandman defeated Don Harris, Sonny Siaki, & David Young.

Ocean City, MD: WWE Smackdown Correspondent: Harry Burkett

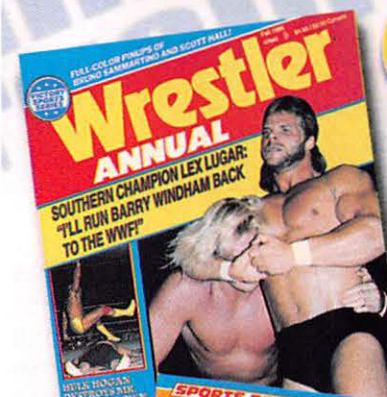
WWE returned to the Ocean City Convention Center for the first time in nine years, and the hard-fought main event—Smackdown tag team champions Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas vs. Chris Benoit and Rhyno—left fans hoping for a return show in the near future. Benoit and Rhyno, in particular, proved they could stand the heat on this Independence Day weekend.

Rhyno grabbed Benjamin in a headlock to begin the action, Benjamin used a go-behind switch for a take-down, but Rhyno maneuvered it into a pin attempt on

(Continued on page 84)

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BRINGING BACK SECONDARY TITLES IS GOOD FOR WWE

By Dave Lenker

RAW CO-GENERAL Manager Eric Bischoff has made a lot of controversial decisions since coming to power in July 2002, but his decision to unify the Raw and Intercontinental championships in a match between then-I-C champion Kane and then-Raw champ Triple-H at the 2002 No Mercy pay-per-view will surely go down as one of the most controversial of his WWE career. Wrestling fans were outraged that after the match, the Intercontinental championship, the most prestigious secondary title in the sport's history, would cease to exist. They also thought that Bischoff was doing it out of pure spite.

Believe it or not, that wasn't Bischoff's motivation, and as a matter of fact, his decision to unify the Intercontinental title with the Raw championship was probably the best move he could have made to help restore the title's prestigious standing.

If you recall, the title had been badly devalued during the promotional war of 2001 that saw Vince McMahon's WWE share TV time with Shane McMahon's WCW and Stephanie McMahon's ECW factions. Between the matches for the WWE and WCW world championships, the WWE and WCW world tag team championships, the WCW U.S. title, the WWE light heavyweight and WCW cruiserweight championships,



Now that the Intercontinental title has been reactivated, Raw stars on the level of Christian, who won it in a battle royal, can wrestle with more of a purpose, argues Dave Lenker.

and the WWE women's championship, it became difficult to remember who the I-C champion was, let alone follow the results of matches for the title. Triple-H's feud with Kane, which centered on Helmsley's allegations of murder and necrophilia, devalued the title even more. As unfortunate as it was, when Helmsley defeated Kane to unify the two titles, the championship's only value was found in the leather, gold, and silver that constructed the belt that represented it. It had become virtually meaningless. It needed some time away. So did the U.S. title.

However, now both titles are back, with the I-C championship on Raw shows and the U.S. title on Smackdown shows—and they couldn't have returned at a better time. The fans have had a chance to forget about the mismanagement of both titles and instead reflect on what they meant to the sport as a whole. They've had a chance to remember classic feuds over the titles, such as the ones that saw Randy Savage and Rick Steamboat clash at WrestleMania III over the I-C title, and Magnum T.A. and Nikita Koloff wrestle a best-of-seven series for the U.S. title.

More important than all that, though, the I-C and U.S. titles can again serve a purpose. They can again be steppingstones for wrestlers looking to advance to main-event stature. Now, Matt Hardy won't have to settle for the cruiserweight title when his movements toward the

Smackdown championship are blocked. Now Christian doesn't have to wrestle virtually aimlessly, because he's the Intercontinental champion—and that finally means something once again.

Once again, the fans can look at the U.S. and Intercontinental champions and glance at the future of the sport, and in doing so, they can also glance backward and respectfully nod their heads at the U.S. and Intercontinental champions of yesteryear.

Dave Lenker is the editor-in-chief of THE WRESTLER.

counterpoint:

WWE IS BETTER OFF WITH FEWER TITLES

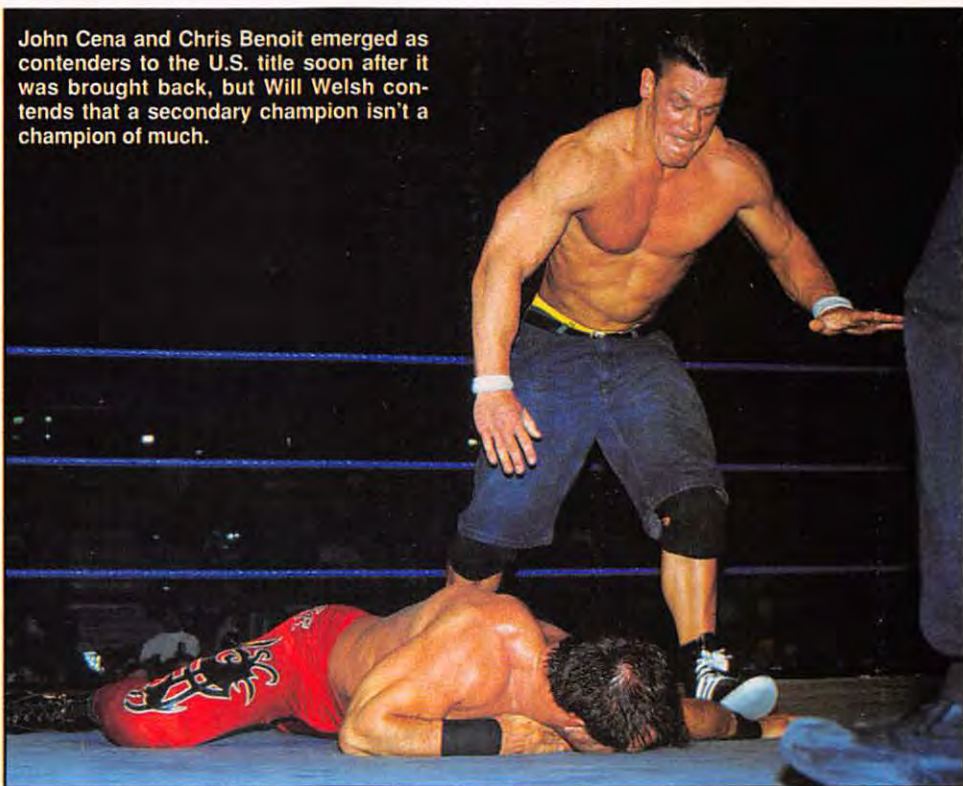
By Will Welsh

DAVE LENKER IS right: At the time that the U.S. and Intercontinental titles were taken away, they were more devalued than Vince McMahon's integrity. They had been underexposed, mismanaged, and were being so poorly received by the fans that WWE officials deemed their existence unnecessary. And while I'm sure that there were a number of fans who lamented their disappearance, the majority kept tuning in to WWE TV without a second's hesitation.

In other words, during their hiatus, the U.S. and Intercontinental titles weren't missed. Not by you, not by me, and not by most of the other people watching WWE TV. The brand extension continued on without them, and despite their absence, everything was hunky-dory.

I think I know why, and my reasoning holds up despite their respective returns. For all their history, for all their scrapbook glory, they don't mean all that much. Maybe they used to carry a lot of significance, but times have changed. Christian might be the Intercontinental champion, but he isn't the number-one contender to Triple-H's Raw championship like he might have been 10 or 15 years ago. Heck, he might not even make Raw's top five list of contenders. Chris Jericho, Bill Goldberg, Kevin Nash, Booker T, and Shawn Michaels would probably be awarded shots at Helmsley's championship long before Christian ever would.

John Cena and Chris Benoit emerged as contenders to the U.S. title soon after it was brought back, but Will Welsh contends that a secondary champion isn't a champion of much.



Now, I'm not what most people would consider a traditionalist, and I realized while doing my research for this "Point/Counterpoint" that my viewpoint might differ from that of others. So, considering that, I took a look around the rest of the sports world to see if there are any other comparable secondary championships, and what I found was this: There aren't any.

Sure, there are regional division champions in sports such as football, hockey, baseball, and basketball, but if those regional champions don't go on to win the world championship, they don't spend the off-season bragging about how they came in second or third. And do you know why that is? No? Okay, I'll tell you: It's because secondary championships are simply there to help console losers who happen to be more talented than

other losers.

All joking aside, I'm not a fan of secondary titles for one simple reason: They allow wrestlers to strive for being something other than the very best, and by that I mean this: If Christian wasn't the I-C champion, he wouldn't be satisfied with his career, and that would force him to become better, to strive to be a main-event talent and Raw championship material.

Sadly, Christian isn't doing that. He's too busy loudly proclaiming his pride in being the I-C champion, which, if you ask me, means that all he's doing is announcing to the world that he's satisfied being Raw's best mid-carder.

Where's the prestige in that?

Will Welsh is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER.

introducing:

By Dan Murphy

JASON CROSS



He never attended wrestling school and was ready to quit the sport just last summer. But desire, determination, and a lot of talent have kept Jason Cross from giving up on his dream of making it big. And he's already been noticed by some prominent promotions

JASON CROSS HAS no pretenses about how he got to where he is today.

"I tend to get a lot of attention because of my finisher," says the 5'10", 212-pounder. "It's opened a few doors for me."

The finisher the NWA-TNA and Ring of Honor competitor is referring to is a shooting star legdrop, and it's one of the most spectacular moves on the independent circuit.

Cross was turned on to spectacular moves and everything else pro wrestling had to offer when he and some friends ordered the AAA/WCW co-promotional pay-per-view *When Worlds Collide* in 1994. That groundbreaking PPV event introduced American audiences to the high-flying Lucha Libre style and featured the likes of Rey Misterio Jr. and Eddie Guerrero. Cross was hooked.

So he began sparring with childhood friend John Phoenix on a trampoline in the backyard, where the two emulated the death-defying leaps they had seen the Luchadors perform. One day, Cross and Phoenix heard about a local indy show taking place in Milledgeville, Georgia, only a 15-minute drive from their neighborhood.

"We showed up and helped put up the ring, and the booker put us in the ring and let us do a few things," Cross said. The two improvised a short exhibition match, and quickly learned the difference between a trampoline and a pro ring.

"We had no idea how different it would be," Cross said. "The ring wears you out a lot more, and your legs hurt real bad. And you learn how to bump pretty correctly pretty quick."

Once Cross graduated from high school, he decided to focus on his dream of making a name for himself as a pro wrestler. He made his debut in NWA Wildside under pro-

moter Bill Behrens. Meanwhile, he continued wrestling on smaller indy shows in Georgia, where he won the Southeastern light heavyweight title, the NAWA Intercontinental title, and the NAWA tag title with David Young.

Though he was never professionally trained, Cross learned an awful lot about wrestling through feuds with A.J. Styles and Tony Mamaluke. In fact, it was during his rivalry with Styles that Cross developed his unorthodox signature maneuver.

"A.J. and I would always try to show each other different things," he said. "I started trying to turn a shooting star press into a legdrop in our matches. For the longest time, I would miss it and land on my feet."

Cross received a primer in mat wrestling and grappling from Mamaluke. After each match, he would be forced to learn counters to new takedowns and submission holds. He even won the Wildside heavyweight title, though his reign lasted just one week.

But just as Cross was starting to make serious headway in his dream of wrestling professionally at a high level, he had a personal crisis that threatened to derail his career.

"I quit the business for about nine months," Cross said. "I had too much going on in my life, some personal problems. I had to decide once and for all whether I wanted to wrestle or not. It was on June 8, 2002. I was supposed to meet Tony Mamaluke and drive to a show. I got about an hour up the road and just turned around and came home. I was done with wrestling."

But Cross found it wasn't easy to walk away from the sport. During his time away from wrestling, he had a chance to evaluate his career path. When he was ready to compete again, he was more committed than ever to becoming a success.

He eventually returned to NWA Wildside under a mask and started a feud with the heel Elite organization. However, after a few short weeks, Cross turned heel himself and became a member of The Elite, joining forces with the monstrous Iceberg and TV champion Rainman.

Behrens helped Cross get a dark match for NWA-TNA on December 4, 2002, against Jimmy Rave. He knew just what the promoters wanted to see.

"They wanted to see the shooting star legdrop," Cross said. "I was able to hit it, and they liked what they saw."

Cross has become a semi-regular on NWA-TNA events since then, though he rarely gets the opportunity to hit his signature move. Thus far, he hasn't been able to win many matches, either, but he is continuing to hone his skills against some of the top talent in the business. In his biggest TNA bout to date, Cross tagged with Jerry Lynn to face Juventud Guerrera and Konnan. The kid from Millidgeville admits to being a little starstruck.

"I was in awe the whole time," he said. "I stood there looking at Juv and thinking, This is one of the guys that made me want to get into the business. And now he wants to take my head off."

Cross has also expanded his horizons beyond the NWA. In May, he competed in Combat Zone Wrestling's Best of the Best Tournament, at which he faced Rave, Jay



Jason Cross may not have been classically trained, but he has a textbook vertical suplex. Despite some early misgivings about wrestling, he is finally making headway in his career and has even become an NWA-TNA regular.

Briscoe, and Styles in a four-way elimination match. Unfortunately, he was the first one eliminated.

Cross also has competed in Ring of Honor and has booked several dates with that "strong-style" promotion throughout the summer. "I'd love to get the opportunity to go 20 minutes with someone like Paul London or C.M. Punk for ROH," he said. "And I always love to go one-on-one with Styles. I'm looking forward to the future." □

Q&A

STACY KEIBLER



"I'm not what you think. I'm not looking for a quick ticket to the top by attaching myself to anyone. I'm a strong woman who likes strong men, and I like men who treat me well."

STACY KEIBLER IS the most beautiful woman in wrestling history—or at least that's the title the readers of our sister magazine **Pro Wrestling Illustrated** bestowed upon last year. Considering that, it's no wonder that she was at the center of such an intense feud between Test and Scott Steiner earlier this year. The two muscled warriors fought each other for the right to win her heart (and her contractual services as their marketing manager), but it was obvious that they were in the fight for different reasons.

Test wanted Keibler by his side just so that he could brag to his buddies (and anyone else listening) that the beautiful blonde was his and his alone. Heck, if it were possible, he probably would have bronzed her and carried her around as a life-sized trophy to his masculinity. Sure, he was fond of her when they first started going out and she took over the marketing of his career, but that fondness turned to something much darker as Keibler's presence at ringside began to overshadow what Test was doing in the ring.

Steiner's motive to win Stacy's services came from a much more honest, if not necessarily decent, desire. "Freakzilla" simply wanted to add the most beautiful woman in the sport to his collection of "freaks," and he made that readily apparent the very first time he sat behind her as she slinked through the ropes—and then asked her to repeat the process just for his own personal gratification. The fact that Keibler didn't object to his somewhat risqué handling of her shapely physique was a nice bonus that he was more than happy to receive.

Keibler recently met with Contributing Writer Liz Hunter to discuss some of her past relationships, her thoughts on what made Test turn into such a bad seed, what she initially saw in Steiner, and her plans for "Big Poppa Pump" now that the two are linked together.

Q: Hi, Stacy, thanks for taking time out of your schedule to sit down with me today.

A: No problem, Liz. It's a pleasure. I've been looking forward to talking to you for a while.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Well, I know that you've been one of the most outspoken voices when it comes to sticking up for women's right in wrestling for a very long time. You were doing it before it was popular. That takes guts.

Q: I appreciate that, Stacy, but I have to admit that I'm a bit

surprised. You're not exactly a poster woman for the women's lib movement.

A: Is that supposed to offend me or something?

Q: If you find it offensive, I can't help that, but that's just the way I see things. From where I sit, you've been out for yourself ever since you won that *Nitro* Girl contest in 1999. How long were you a *Nitro* Girl, anyway? A couple of weeks before you changed outfits, put on the short skirt, and became Miss Hancock?

A: What does how I started in the business have to with anything? I saw an opportunity, and I took it. If you don't do that, you're not going to get very far in the wrestling world.

Q: Yeah, then you saw David Flair, the son of the legendary Ric Flair, and you started dating him. Was that just an opportunity? Was dancing on top of a desk to attract the attention of Vince McMahon during the interview process to fill his open executive secretary position an opportunity? Was attaching yourself to Test just an opportunity? Is Scott Steiner an opportunity?

A: Listen, Liz, I'm really sorry that we've gotten off to such a bad start, but I'm not what you think. I'm not looking for a quick ticket to the top by attaching myself to anyone. I'm a strong woman who likes strong men, and I like men who treat me well. Is there anything wrong with that?

Q: I guess that's for you to decide in the end.

A: Exactly, so why don't we put this topic to rest and move on

to more current issues, okay?

Q: Sure thing, Stacy. Let's talk about your situation with Test—is that an issue that's currently open for discussion?

A: Yes. Yes, it is. I want everyone to know about the real Test.

Q: Good, I wouldn't want to ruffle any more of your feathers. Now, when

We tried and tried, but we couldn't get the whole truth and nothing but the truth from Stacy Keibler about her relationship with "Freakzilla." It sure looks more than professional.



you first started dating Test, sparks really seemed to fly between the two of you. From what I could tell, you instantly hit it off. Then you introduced Scott Steiner into the mix, and your relationship with Test quickly went south. What happened?

A: Trust me, things with Test had



It was so uncomfortable watching Test berate (above left) and then force a kiss on Stacy (above right) days before Bad Blood. She claims he became fed up when she stood up for herself.

been going south way before Scott came on the scene. If you remember, I caught him looking at Torrie Wilson's *Playboy* photo spread on a couple of different occasions. He carried it around in his bag. I think he was obsessed with her.

Q: Yes, you did, but when all that happened, many people thought that it was a forgivable offense. While it may not be right, a lot of other men in committed relationships also pick up an occasional issue of *Playboy*.

A: Yeah, but most of them don't know the woman that they're looking at!

Q: Okay, point taken. Things were going downhill, but when you brought in Scott Steiner as a tag team partner for Test, things really began to collapse.

A: I think part of Test's problem is that he's a jealous guy, but I think the major problem was that he's always been able to dominate his girlfriends. He's been able to tell them what to do and how to do it, and if they didn't do it exactly his way, he let them go because he always had another girl waiting in the wings. I think I was different for him, though ...

Q: Did you really believe that?

A: Sure I did. I've been in this business long enough to learn that I have to stand my ground, no matter how big the man trying

to intimidate me is—and I think that I stood up to Test probably more than any other woman he's been involved with. Other women, they wouldn't dare disagree with him for fear of losing him, but I was the exact opposite. I made my opinions known, and he wasn't terribly happy that he wasn't able to dictate my every move.

Q: But you're still avoiding the question: What happened when Steiner came aboard?

A: I think that just knowing I had a professional—and a strictly professional interest, I might add—in another wrestler pushed Test over the edge. He couldn't handle it, and when that happened, I realized that I couldn't handle his overprotective, paranoid behavior for one more minute. Some of those things he called me—I'll never forgive or forget that.

Q: That's understandable, I guess.

A: Was that a compliment?

Q: Just an observation.

A: Oh.

Q: Okay, moving on, you said that things with Test were already starting to deteriorate when you brought Steiner in, but you haven't said why you brought in Steiner in the first place.

A: You might not want to believe me, but I thought that having Scott Steiner as a partner would have been good for Test. It would've given him someone to

go after the tag team title with, and it would have given him someone to watch his back when he needed some help. I thought that they'd make a good pair, too. Scott and Test have both been around the business for a while, but Scott is someone who Test could have learned from. He's toured the world, and he's been a world champion a couple of different times. I believed Test could have had success with him while also learning from him at the same time.

Q: Interesting ... you initially brought in Steiner for Test, but now you're with Steiner and your relationship with Test is over. How did that come about?

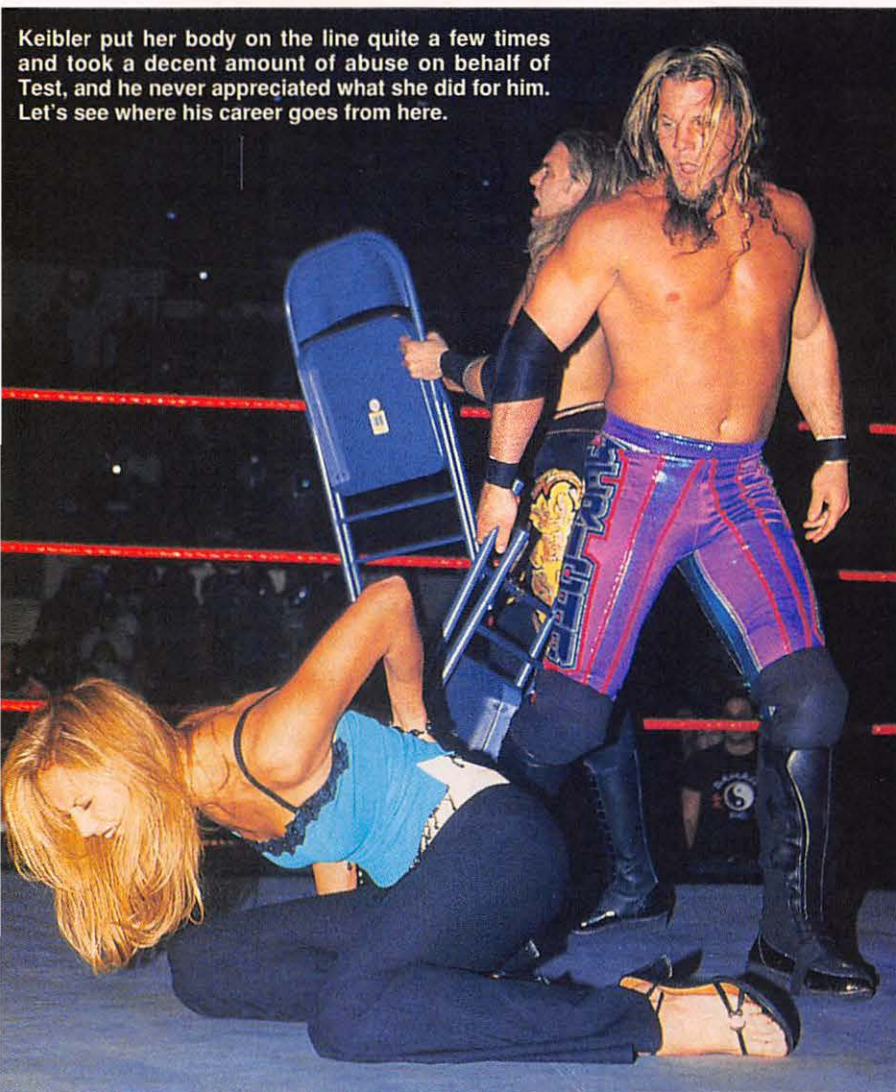
A: Scott saw how Test was treating me, and he was concerned. Even though I was still standing up to him, I was taking abuse that I shouldn't have been taking, and Scott stuck up for me and protected me. He got in Test's face and told him to cut it out or else.

Q: Or else?

A: Or else Scott was going to make him cut it out, and that's exactly what happened at Bad Blood when Scott beat Test to keep me in his corner.

Q: But are you just in Scott's corner? The way you walk through the ring ropes and then do it again just for his pleasure sure seems like you

Keibler put her body on the line quite a few times and took a decent amount of abuse on behalf of Test, and he never appreciated what she did for him. Let's see where his career goes from here.

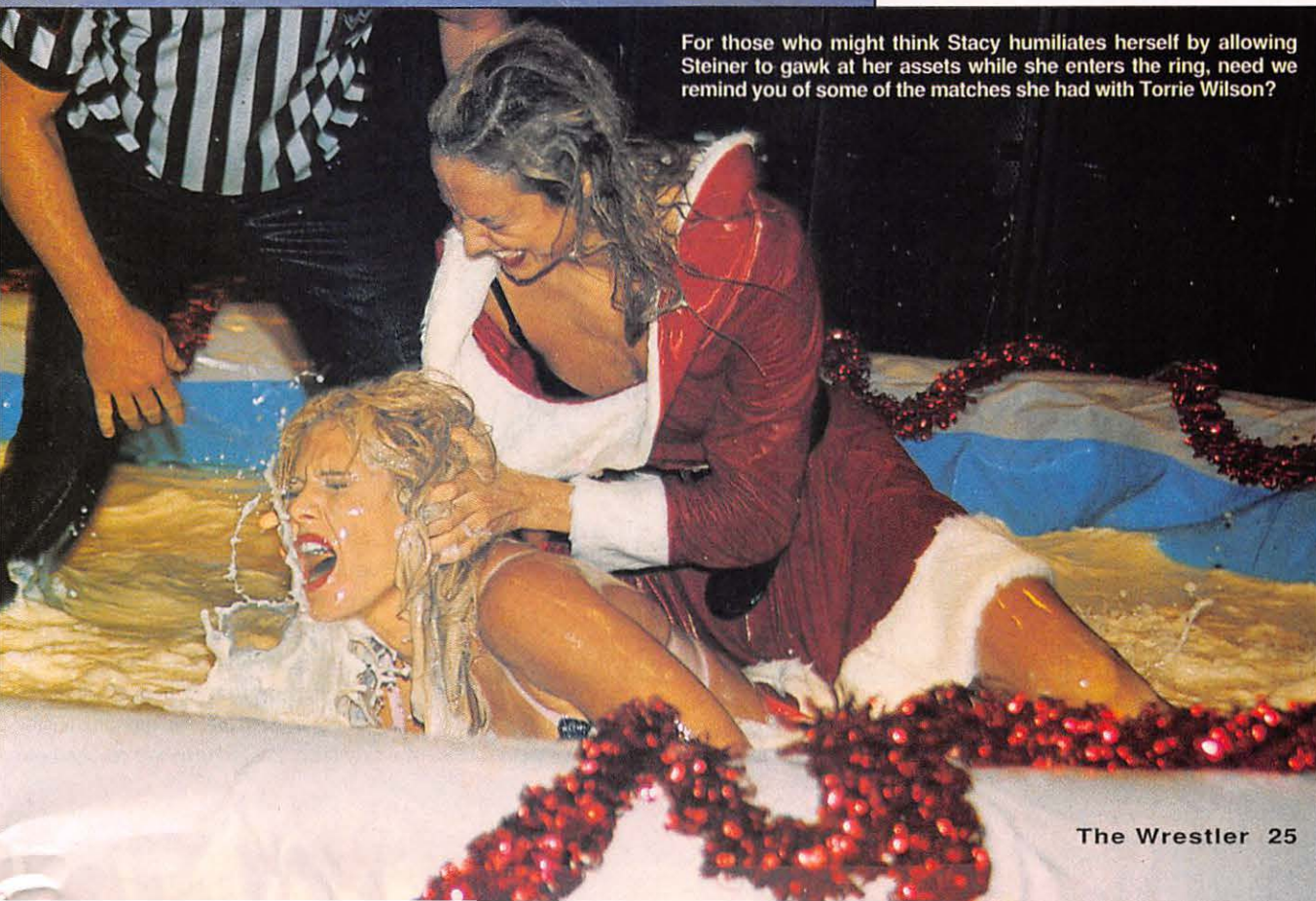


and him have something more than just a regular professional relationship. He's also a little liberal with where he places his hands. He certainly doesn't act like a guy palling around with his manager, if you know what I mean. So what's the real story?

A: I'll give you the real story. The real story is it's none of your business or anyone else's business what's going on between Scott and me. If people want to speculate that we're some kind of couple, let them, because only the people in my life I truly care about know the whole truth.

Q: And that truth is?

A: That truth is a secret, Liz. We have people wondering whether we are or whether we aren't together everywhere we go, and I think that gives Scott an advantage every time he steps inside the ring, because it gives his opponent something else to think about as I stand there and as he helps me through the ropes. And that's all you're going to get out of me on that or any other subject right now! □

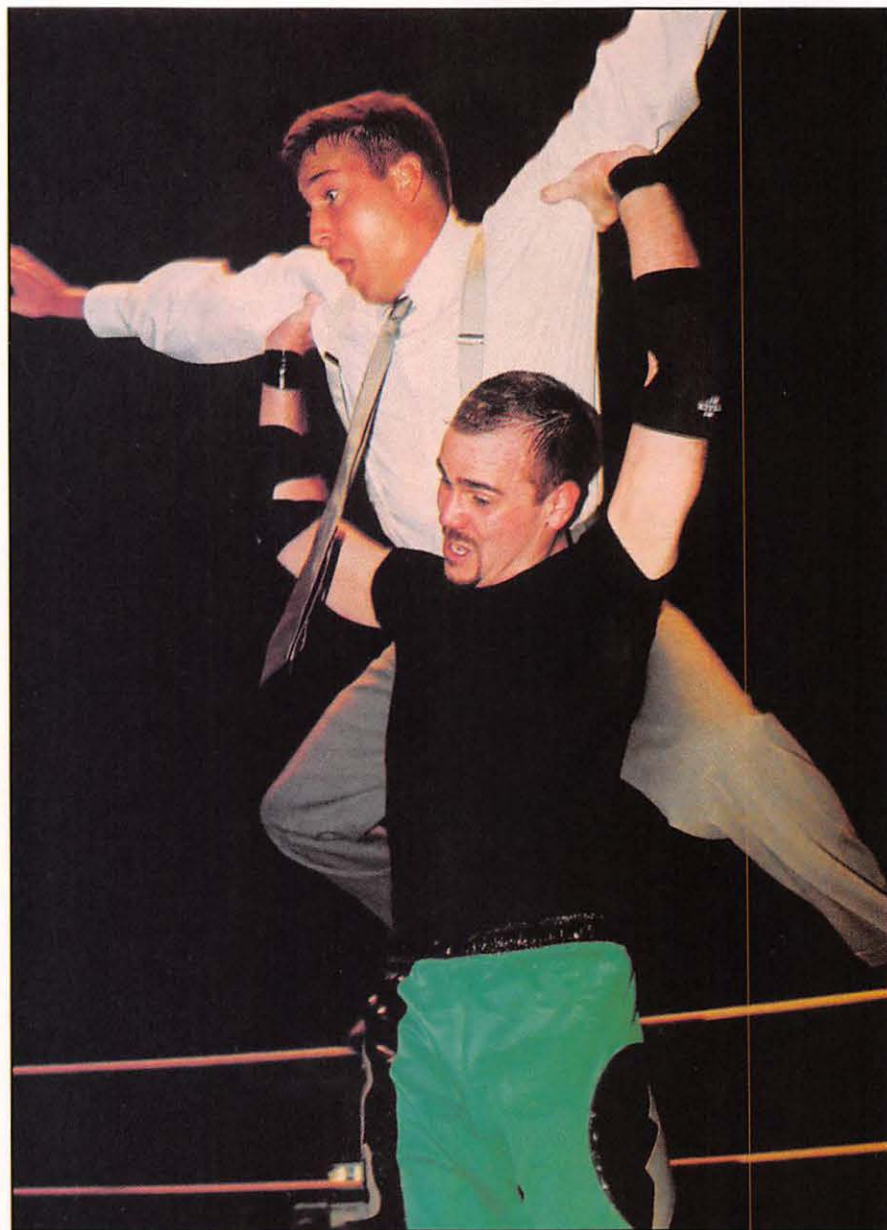
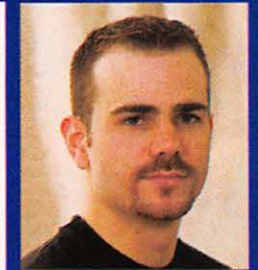


For those who might think Stacy humiliates herself by allowing Steiner to gawk at her assets while she enters the ring, need we remind you of some of the matches she had with Torrie Wilson?

from bell to bell

By Mike Quackenbush

[Editor's note: Mike Quackenbush, who has held numerous titles throughout the Northeast and elsewhere, files reports on the life of an independent wrestler seeking to make an impact on the business. In this issue, he writes about his second tour of Europe, which took place just two months after the first, and why he can't wait to fly back across the Atlantic yet again.]



Getting a strong reaction from jaded independent fans in the U.S. can be very difficult, as Mike Quackenbush (shown against manager Paul Adams) has discovered. Wrestling in Europe can be an entirely different—and much more positive—experience.

FOR THOSE OF you who missed it, last issue in this space I wrote about my first tour of Europe. From Lucerne, Switzerland to Essen, Germany, I got to see everything from modern urban Europe to rural settings seemingly ripped from two centuries past. When I got back home to the United States, I doubted that I would ever have an experience equal to it. That was, of course, until I went back.

Eight weeks removed from my first wrestling-related overseas adventure, I was crammed back into an undersized Swiss Air seat jetting across the Atlantic. I had left Europe on a positive note with both the wrestlers and the fans, and to say I was anxious to return would be something of an understatement.

However, when I flew home in April, I had no idea if coming back was even a realistic option. I split my time abroad between teaching fellow independent wrestlers and commuting to and from the wrestling shows themselves. It was a whirlwind week from the moment I touched down to the moment I was back checking my luggage at the ticket counter. Those days were some of the busiest in my life, the schedule was insane, and the change in time zones left my internal clock so out of whack that I didn't know when to sleep and when to put the pedal to the metal. I couldn't wait to try it again.

Fortunately, the call was quick in coming, as patience is not one of my strongest virtues. I returned to Europe in June to once again teach and perform in a tightly woven schedule that only provided for sightseeing done from the passenger side of a tiny auto. By the time we reached our

final stop in Germany, our rental car wasn't the only thing running low on fuel. The climate there is practically the same as it is in my home state of Pennsylvania from month to month, so other than the obvious language barrier, it isn't all that much different from home.

Since my last visit, I tried to learn some useful phrases, but the vast majority of the Essen residents speak such fluent English that trying out my clunky German proved to be a waste of time. Even when I was at home, the fans from German independent Westside Xtreme Wrestling wrote to me mostly in English, with the occasional bit of Dutch, Swiss-German, or whatever added to the mix. A Web site from Luxembourg even conducted an online interview with me in English. I was anxious to return not just for the chance to enjoy another working vacation in Europe, but because of the fans I encountered.

When I last wrestled in the cozy confines of the Roxy, I performed before a wildly appreciative group of European fans that were so vociferous in their support, so accommodating in their manners, and so respectful in their observation of what I do in the ring that I can't really analogize the experience with any other that I've had during my entire career. In all my years as an independent, I've gone from show to show trying to win over an audience, coaxing fans to accept my in-ring style little by little. But in Essen, it was as if the audience was trying to win me over, convincing me that the best forum for my own international hybrid of wrestling styles was at last presenting itself. It's the kind of thing that many of us on the independent circuit spend years, sometimes entire lifetimes, searching for—anywhere and everywhere we go.

I truly wondered how unusual the reaction I received last time could have been. Perhaps these fans treat all foreigners with a special regard, or perhaps they are so starved for wrestling here that all the wrestlers are celebrated visitors to Essen. As I heard the opening notes of my entrance theme begin to play in the Roxy, and the rants of my opponent, already in the ring, a rumbling overtook them both. The music and shouts of Switzerland's Double C were drowned out by the pounding on the floor and ring as the fans chanted my name. Even if this type of reaction was typical in Essen, it was hard not to feel like a star.



Wrestling European sensation Jody Fleisch might be a career highlight for a lot of American independent wrestlers. But as enjoyable as that was for Quackenbush, a possible rematch with Fleisch isn't the number-one reason he wants to go back across the pond.

Just hours before my scheduled flight home, I met Jody Fleisch and X-Dream in the finals of a cruiserweight title tournament. I was lucky enough to emerge victorious, capturing the wXw cruiserweight belt from reigning champ Fleisch in the process. I'm not sure if the win meant more to me, or to the fans that surrounded the ring on all sides and called out to me. It did signify the same thing to all of us, though, as it meant I would be back soon enough to defend my newly won championship. I was once told that the only reason a wrestler should speak on the microphone is to try to sell tickets. Speaking on the micro-

phone that night, all I could do was thank people—my opponents, the fans, the promoters—for making me feel welcome.

Every passing day, I keep hoping to spot that European Union code on my caller ID box by the phone. At the moment, I have no idea exactly when I will return to Europe. I have learned this much in my two trips across the Atlantic, however: I won't go back because of any special food I ate, or a desire to experience a foreign culture, or because I need to keep paying the bills. When I return, I'll be going back for the fans, and to me, that's not just a corny cliché. □

Spotlight On...

YOSHIHIRO TAJIRI

YOSHIHIRO TAJIRI AND Eddie Guerrero may make for a strange pairing on paper, but "The Japanese Buzzsaw" and his Latino partner have

proven themselves worthy of their status as WWE Smackdown tag champions.

Tajiri was born on September 29, 1970, in Tamana City, Kumamoto Pre-

fecture, Japan ... Learned the art of kickboxing in high school and competed at the collegiate level at Hakata University, where he studied business ... Yearned to travel and begin earning money ... In 1994, he saw an ad for a pro wrestling training dojo operated by the International Wrestling Alliance ... In Japan, wrestling offered more career options than kickboxing, so Tajiri traded in the shin pads and gloves for a tryout at the dojo.

Tajiri was trained by Kendo Nagasaki and was rewarded with opening matches on IWA cards ... Around this time, he met Victor Quinones, a man who owned several promotions worldwide and served the WWF as a talent coordinator in Japan, Mexico, and Puerto Rico ... Quinones saw raw potential in Tajiri and helped him get booked on a tour of the U.S., highlighted by a title shot against NWA champion Dan Severn on June 24, 1995, in Williamstown, New Jersey.

In 1996, Tajiri toured with Big Japan Wrestling, competing for promoter Shin-ya Kojika ... Was given a mask and christened Aquarius ... Quickly established himself as the top light heavyweight competitor in Big Japan ... In search of bigger challenges and bigger paydays, Tajiri agreed to a tour of Mexico, signing with EMLL and the FULL promotion in Monterrey ... Didn't take long to adapt to the fast-paced Lucha style ... On July 19, 1996, Aquarius pinned Dr. Wagner Jr. to win the CMLL light heavyweight title, his first major championship. Shortly after winning that belt, Aquarius unmasked before a Japanese audience and resumed wrestling under his real name.

Due in part to Quinones' influence, Tajiri was invited to compete in a major show for New Japan Pro Wrestling. To Tajiri's delight, he was scheduled to face Shinjiro Ohtani, the top light heavyweight in the promotion ... On January 4, 1997, Tajiri and Ohtani squared off in front of



March 1999: Tajiri was so clean-cut when he arrived in ECW. Who would have guessed he had such a mean streak, such a nasty side, and such a brutal array of kicks in his repertoire?



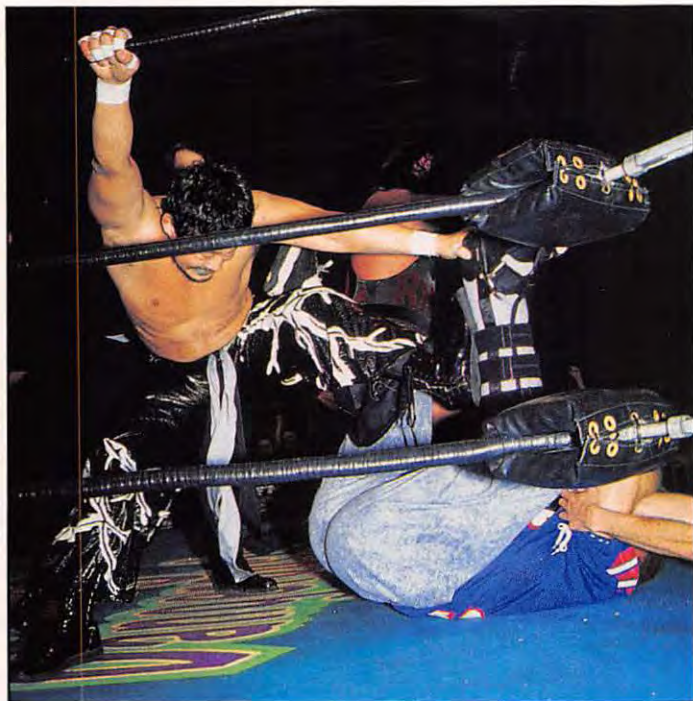


May 1999: For months on end, ECW fans were treated to Tajiri vs. Super Crazy, on almost every show in every city. And they never tired of watching that rivalry.

more than 50,000 fans ... Lost the match, but impressed the fans and was invited to compete in the prestigious Super Junior Tournament ... Among others competing in that three-week tournament were Ohtani, Chris Jericho, Chavo Guerrero Jr., and Jushin Liger ... Scored a major upset during the tourney by defeating Ohtani.

On June 7, 1997, Tajiri teamed with

Ohtani to defeat Liger and El Samurai in Yokohama, Japan. Coming on the heels of the Super Junior Tournament, Tajiri's performance convinced the discerning Japanese fans that the former kickboxer had the skills to develop in-

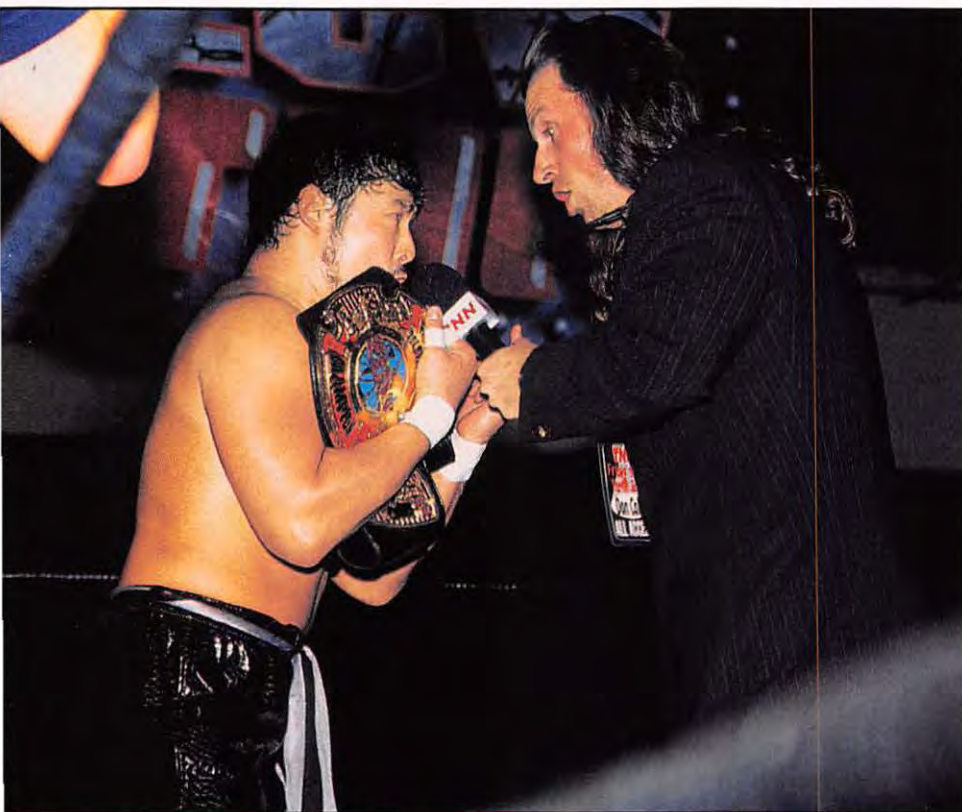


March 2000: It's unfortunate that we have never seen a WWE chapter of the Tajiri-Rob Van Dam feud that started in ECW, back when Tajiri was a dastardly heel.

to an important player.

Tajiri continued competing in Big Japan and formed a tag team with Ryuji Yamakawa ... Captured the vacant Big Japan tag team title together by defeating Takashi Ishikawa and Kishin Kawabata on July 23, 1997 ... Lost the belts but regained them on January 2, 1998, defeating Gedo and Jado ... One month after that win, Tajiri again defeated Gedo, this time in the finals of a tournament to crown the first Big Japan junior heavyweight champion.

Though he was a top draw in Big Japan, Tajiri was unhappy with the promotion and quit, earning a reputation as a renegade in the Orient ... Quinones helped Tajiri book another tour of Mexico, and he returned to EMLL and FULL ... Met up with the man who would become his biggest rival, Super Crazy ... The Tajiri-Super Crazy feud was one of the hottest in Mexico, matching Tajiri's stiff kicks and innovative submission holds against Crazy's high-speed aerial assault ... In early-1999, Quinones sent ECW owner Paul Heyman a tape of Tajiri-Crazy matches, and Heyman quickly invited both men to join his extreme promotion ... After fulfilling contractual obligations in Mexico, Tajiri made his ECW debut on December 11, 1998, beating Antifaz del Norte.



April 2000: After Tajiri captured the ECW TV title from Super Crazy, the evil Cyrus demanded that "The Japanese Buzzsaw" go along with his master plan and hand the belt to Rhyno. But Tajiri made Rhyno beat him for it (which he did).



May 2000: Once he finally broke away from Steve Corino, who controlled him for months in ECW, Tajiri wanted nothing more than to spill Corino's blood. He did ... buckets of it!

Tajiri and Super Crazy resumed their feud in ECW, and their battles quickly won over ECW's most demanding fans. Fans especially loved Tajiri's most unusual submission hold, the tarantula, as well as his stiff kicks and fluid execution ... Pinned Super Crazy at the inaugural

Guilty as Charged pay-per-view in Kissimmee, Florida ... Earned even more respect by pinning Little Guido (Nunzio) at the 1999 Hardcore Heaven PPV, proving he was not simply a novelty attraction that could only compete against other outside talent ... Caught the eye of Steve Corino, and "The King Of Old School" offered Tajiri an undisclosed amount of cash to become his newest foot soldier ... Accepted the payoff and attacked ECW champion Tazz, flattening him with a series of jarring kicks.

Tajiri signed to wrestle Tazz at the Heat Wave PPV and promised he would hand the ECW title over to Corino after the match ... Result was one of the most gory contests in ECW history ... Tajiri held his own against Tazz, but the champion's

rage could not be stifled. Tazz ripped open Tajiri's mouth with barbed wire, forcing the referee to stop the bout ... Then locked Tajiri in his Tazzmission finisher that nearly ended his career.

As a testament to his toughness, Tajiri was back in the ring mere weeks later, this time picking a fight with Tommy Dreamer ... Spewed green mist into Francine's face, blinding Dreamer's valet and igniting a feud with "The Innovator Of Violence" ... Came out on the short end of this feud as well.

On April 8, 2000, Tajiri finally got his long-coveted gold, beating Crazy and Guido in a three-way match to win the TV title ... However, Corino was furious that Tajiri wouldn't turn the belt over to his handpicked champion, Rhyno, so Corino, Rhyno, and Jack Victory attacked him ... Lost the TV title to Rhyno after a two-week reign, but gained a measure of revenge on Corino with a win over him at Hardcore Heaven 2000.

On August 25, 2000, Tajiri and Mikey Whipwreck won a one-night tournament to win the vacant ECW tag title ... Dropped the title to The Full-Blooded Italians the next night ... Whipwreck and Tajiri fell under the guidance of The Sinister Minister, but they remained quite popular ... They beat Super Crazy and Kid Kash at the Massacre on 34th Street



August 2000: The only bad thing about Tajiri's tarantula (applied here against Little Guido/Nunzio) is that technically, it's illegal, as he needs the ropes to make it work.



July 2001: Two years after Tazz beat him in defense of the ECW title and nearly ended his career, Tajiri, representing the WWF, avenged the loss by beating "The Human Suplex Machine," who was then loyal to the WCW/ECW Alliance.



December 2001: The Undertaker was none too happy when Tajiri spit green mist in his face during a bout that was just a bit of a size mismatch.

PPV ... A short time later, with ECW on the verge of going under, Tajiri signed a letter of intent to wrestle for the WWF.

Most observers doubted the 190-pound, Japanese-speaking Tajiri could succeed in the WWF ... Debuted on WWF TV on the May 24, 2001, edition of *Smackdown* as Commissioner William Regal's Japanese assistant ... Regal and Tajiri were comedic gold, with Regal speaking to Tajiri in English and Tajiri

responding in Japanese, and neither quite sure he knew what the other was saying ... Teamed with Kane and The Undertaker to defeat The Dudley Boys and Tazz on July 19, 2001 ... Despite being an ECW alumnus, Tajiri remained loyal to the WWF during the



March 2002: Tajiri will always be able to say he once had a future *Playboy* cover girl—Torrie Wilson—on his arm. Can you believe he objected to her choice of attire?

Invasion storyline ... At the Invasion PPV, Tajiri made short work of Tazz with his green mist in a match that was far less violent than their ECW clash ... Pinned X-Pac to win the WWF light heavyweight title on August 6 ... Win must have impressed Torrie Wilson, as she became Tajiri's manager ... Their pairing didn't last long, though, as Tajiri thought it was improper for a "kept woman" to wear such skimpy clothing.

On September 10, 2001, Tajiri won the WCW U.S. title from

Kanyon ... Was once again foiled by Rhyno, this time after a 13-day reign ... Defeated Billy Kidman for the cruiserweight title one month later ... Kidman regained the belt, but Tajiri won it back in an action-packed match at Backlash.

In late-2002, Tajiri went into a bit of a slump and reduced his schedule to deal with family issues at home. He dropped from the PPV scene and occasionally teamed with Funaki ... On January 24, 2003, Tajiri again scored a major upset, beating Chris Jericho in a match in Tokyo, Japan ... Win was never acknowledged in the U.S. ... Finally caught a break at Judgment Day, the PPV at which he was selected as a substitute for the injured Chavo Guerrero Jr. against Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas ... Tajiri and Eddie Guerrero made the most of their shot, winning the *Smackdown* tag title from Team Angle in a ladder match.

Tajiri is once again a focal point of a major WWE storyline. In only nine years of wrestling, he has established himself as an international headliner and a championship talent.



June 2003: Sean O'Haire became just another victim of the tarantula during Tajiri and Eddie Guerrero's *Smackdown* tag title defense against O'Haire and Roddy Piper inside Madison Square Garden.

Section compiled by Dan Murphy

PRO WRESTLING HAS come a long way since its origins in the traveling carnival circuits and smoky boxing gymnasiums of the past. Men and women of all shapes, sizes, backgrounds, and personalities have left their mark on the sport we now know as pro wrestling. Some of those greats of the past have contributed their own unique styles to wrestling, and the influence of these innovators continues to be seen today.

In this very special section, we look back, decade by decade (starting with the 1930s), at some of the competitors that changed the course of wrestling history and whose careers can be seen as milestones in



A WRESTLER Retrospective:

The Evolution of

WRESTLING

the evolution of pro wrestling.

At first glance, there might appear to be some glaring omissions from this compilation: wrestlers whose championship credentials surely would have landed them high on a list of the greatest wrestlers of the past 75 years. Our goal, however, was to recognize those special athletes whose effects on the sport were profoundly felt during the decade in which he or she competed, and helped shape the sport for all years ahead.

Certainly, strong arguments can be made for stars such as Dusty Rhodes and Mil Mascaras and Fabulous Moolah, but at whose expense would these stars be included? That's open for debate, and we'd be happy to print dissenting views in an upcoming issue.

The Evolution of **WRESTLING** [1930s]



Jim Londos

Jim LONDOS

Born Chris Theophilos in Argos, Greece, the man known as "The Golden Greek" changed his name to Jim Londos due to the popularity of author Jack London. Londos quickly became one of wrestling's most popular names, due largely to his muscular physique and handsome features. In fact, Londos cultivated a huge female fan following and attracted thousands of women to the smoke-filled, male-dominated wrestling arenas. "The Golden Greek" was more than a pretty face, however. He won versions of the NWA World title in 1930 and 1934 (title recognition varied somewhat by territory), and is widely credited with inventing the sleeperhold in 1931.

Bronko NAGURSKI

Bronko Nagurski was the first pro wrestler to successfully make the transition from the gridiron to the squared circle, going from the NFL to the NWA. Nagurski played for the Chicago Bears and has been enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Following his retirement from football, he defeated Lou Thesz for the NWA World title in 1939, and won the title again in 1941. In moving from a mainstream sport to pro wrestling, Nagurski helped bring credibility to the grappling game and blazed a trail for other footballers-turned-wrestlers, including Wahoo McDaniel, Ernie Ladd, and Bill Goldberg. Nagurski remains the only

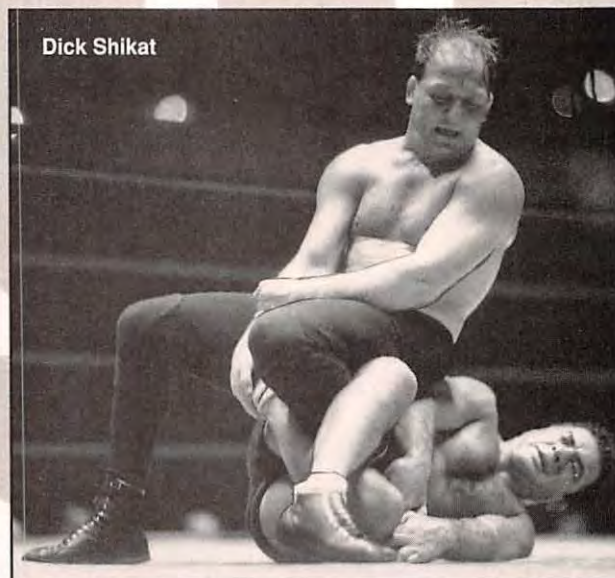


Bronko Nagurski

former pro wrestler ever to be featured on a postage stamp.

Dick SHIKAT

On August 23, 1929, Dick Shikat defeated Jim Londos in Philadelphia. Even though Gus Sonnenberg was widely recog-



Dick Shikat



nized as the reigning National Wrestling Alliance World champion at the time, Shikat became recognized as the new National Wrestling Association champion. The latter entity was a division of the National Boxing Association, giving the title more prestige and credibility. Though the world championship designation was disputed throughout the 1930s, Shikat helped bring the situation into better focus by being a fighting champion and taking on all challengers. After Danno O'Mahony "unified" the title, Shikat restaked his claim as rightful champion by winning the championship from O'Mahony.

Danno O'MAHONY

By the mid-1930s, the world championship was badly fractured, as regional promoters battled over who the rightful champion truly was. "Irish" Danno O'Mahony set out to put an end to the championship mess once and for all. On June 27, 1935, O'Mahony defeated Jim Londos for a version of the NWA World title. Just three days later, O'Mahony defeated former Olympian Ed Don George for another version of the title (one that George had held for two years). Finally, one month later, O'Mahony beat Ed "Strangler" Lewis for yet another version of the title (a version Lewis had held

for three years). Because of those three wins, O'Mahony became the closest thing to an undisputed world champion wrestling had ever known.

Danny McSHAIN

While the world championship picture may have been cloudy, everyone knew the dominant light heavyweight champion of the 1930s was Danny McShain. A talented amateur wrestler, McShain had exceptional cardiovascular training. As opponents were blowing up, McShain was catching his second (or third) wind. McShain was a master of submission wrestling and used his quickness to avoid and outmaneuver larger opponents. He set the standard for light heavyweight wrestling.



Danny McShain



Danno O'Mahony

The Evolution of **WRESTLING** [1940s]



Gorgeous George

Gorgeous **GEORGE**

George Wagner wrestled under his own name for about 10 years before taking on the name Gorgeous George in the early-1940s. He dyed his long hair blond, wore elaborately sequined robes, and was always accompanied to the ring by a valet who would spray the ring with disinfectant

prior to his bouts. George was wrestling's first true showman, and he became a mainstream icon. It has been said that more people bought television sets to see

Gorgeous George than to see any other performer, including Lucille Ball. In 1949, George headlined the first Madison Square Garden wrestling card, defeating Ernie Dussek. The review from the *New York Times* sports department: "Gorgeous George? Phooey!" His impact on sports entertainment is unmistakable.

The ANGEL

Looking for the polar opposite of Gorgeous George? The Angel was that creature. With his shaved head, gnarled, cauliflower ears, hirsute body, and crazed sneer, The Angel was wrestling's first freak. Fans came to the matches just to see the man-

monster with the misleading name. He was a brute and a villain that terrified children and adults alike, and his wildman persona has been emulated countless times, most notably by George "The Animal" Steele. The Angel's bearhug was virtually unbreakable. When he defeated "The Buffalo Pole" Iron Talun in 1942, fans almost rioted to save Talun from the monstrous Angel.

Lou THESZ

Lou Thesz was born to wrestle—that's all there was to it. A second-generation wrestler (his father was a shootfighter in Hungary), Thesz captured his first NWA World title in 1937 at the age of 21. He would go on to win the NWA World title six times, with his final reigning ending in the year he turned 50. From 1948 to 1956,



The Angel



Lou Thesz



Thesz was undefeated as champion. In the 1940s, a young Thesz put an end to championship controversies once and for all. A true hooker, Thesz was one of wrestling's all-time tough guys. His knowledge of submission moves truly was encyclopedic.

Mildred BURKE

Mildred Burke saw her first wrestling match at the age of 19, and immediately began training to make her pro debut. With her fit physique and coiffed hair, she could have been mistaken for a World War II pinup model, but Burke was an athlete first and foremost. Her powerful legs were dangerous weapons, and she could make almost anyone submit to a leg scissors. With her famed alligator clutch finisher, Burke won her first championship in 1936 and once went 15 years

without a loss. She is largely responsible for the rise in popularity in women's wrestling in the 1950s, and was the first woman wrestler to combine a certain amount of exotic beauty with hard-nosed grappling.

Frank SEXTON

Nicknamed "The Powerhouse," Frank Sexton made his pro debut in 1932. With his good looks, classic style, and strong work ethic, Sexton slowly climbed the ladder, wrestling the likes of Lou Thesz and Dick Shikat. In 1944, Sexton moved to the New England and Toronto territories, where he became the top star in the area.

On May 21, 1945, Sexton beat Sandor Szabo for a version of the AWA heavyweight title, a title some considered to be the true world title due to the controversies surrounding the NWA championship. Sexton raised the title's prominence to a national level by promising to "meet anyone, anytime, anywhere, winner take all."

Frank Sexton



Mildred Burke



The Evolution of **WRESTLING** [1950s]



Antonino Rocca

Antonino **ROCCA**

Antonino "Argentina" Rocca was wrestling's first truly spectacular high-flyer. Like some of the women wrestlers of the era, Rocca chose to compete barefoot. Schooled in gymnastics as well as grappling, he stymied his opponents with dropkicks, cartwheels, and flips. Rocca was also a true innovator, continuously finding new and flashy escapes from holds and using his athletic

ism to surprise opponents. Rocca's unorthodox moves often frustrated his opponents, creating openings for "Argentina" to move in for a quick pin. Today's cruiserweight and Lucha Libre style would

not exist without Rocca's contribution to wrestling.

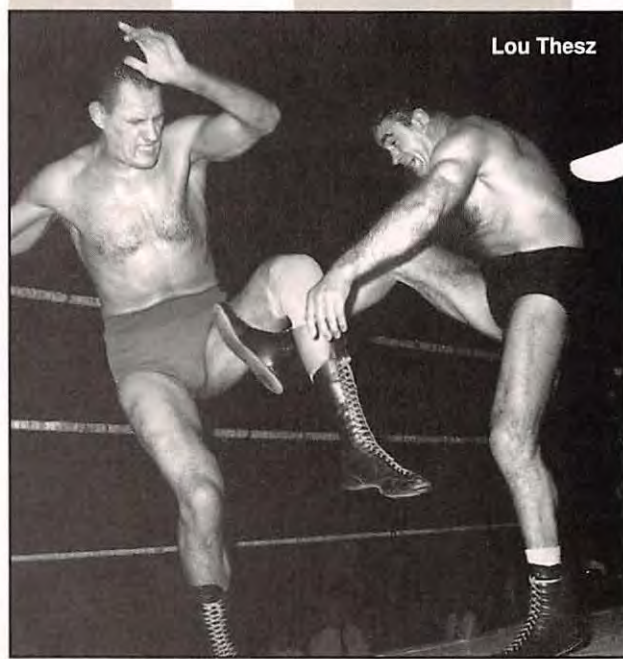
Lou **THESZ**

Thesz continued to be the dominant NWA World champion throughout the 1950s. He was one of wrestling's great ambassadors, an intelligent and well-spoken individual who carried himself

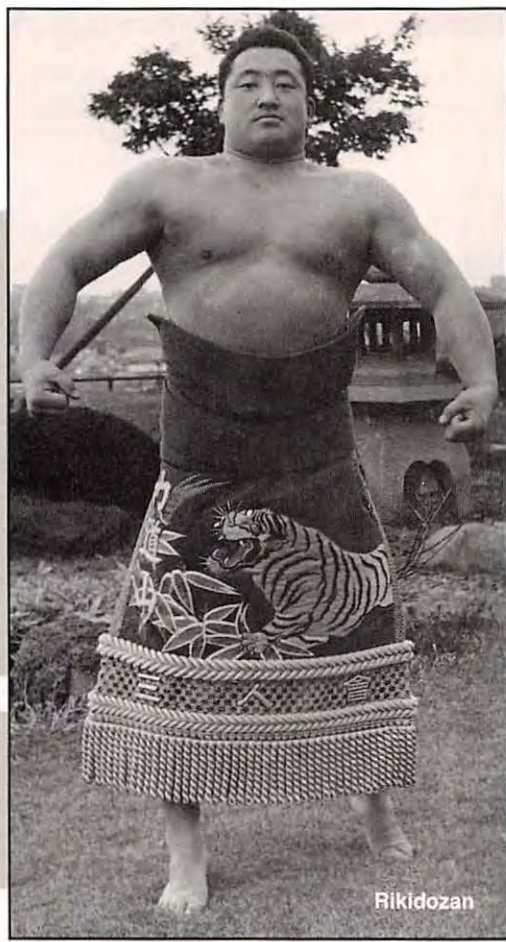
with grace and class both inside and outside the ring. Thesz dropped the title to Whipper Watson in a 1956 match in which boxer Jack Dempsey served as referee, but regained the title later that year. In total, Thesz held the NWA title for an amazing seven years, two months, and five days throughout the 1950s. Today, the vertical bodypress he often used is known as the Thesz press, and it remains one of the most effective take-downs in wrestling.

RIKIDOZAN

Considered to be "the father of pro wrestling" in Japan, Rikidozan became a fan of the style of pro wrestling he saw in the United States and worked to bring that style (dubbed *puroresu*, a Japanese



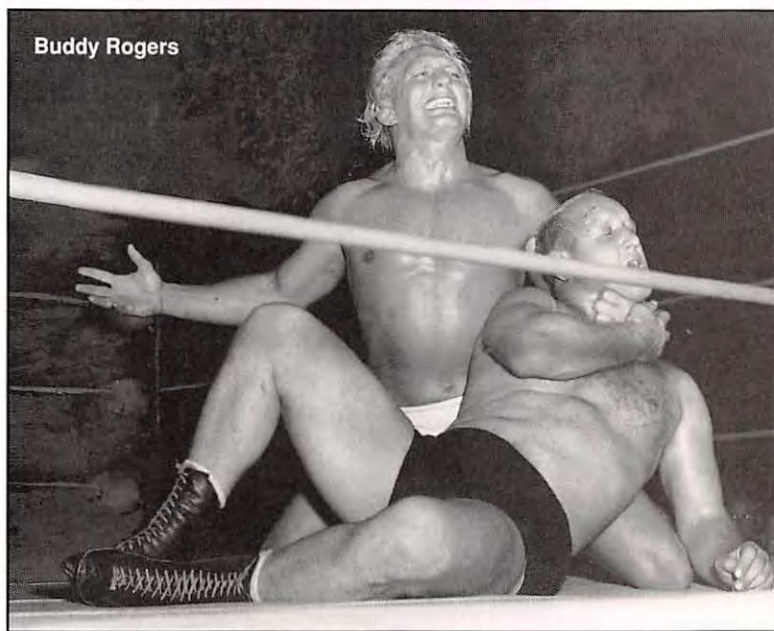
Lou Thesz



Rikidozan



Buddy Rogers



patterned himself after Rogers, and defeated Rogers in a "Nature Boy" vs. "Nature Boy" match in 1981.

El SANTO

El Santo ("The Saint") was Mexico's equivalent of Rikidozan, helping to expand the burgeoning art of pro wrestling south of the border. El Santo competed in a white mask and wrestled in the manner of

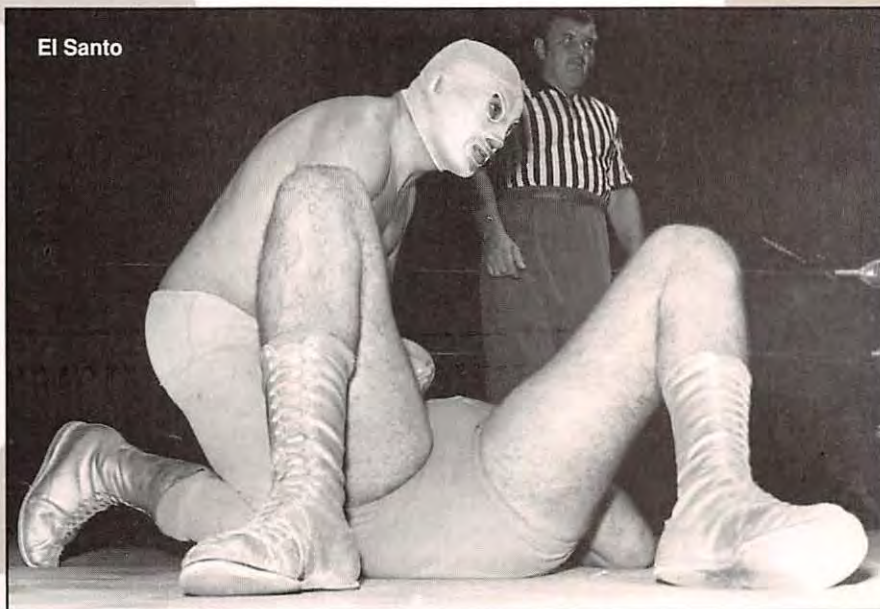
pronunciation of the term pro wrestling) to Japan. In 1951, Japan held its first *puroresu* card. It became a sensation in post-World War II Japan, and Rikidozan became the biggest homegrown star. Rikidozan brought American wrestlers such as The Destroyer and others into Japan and helped make *puroresu* one of the biggest draws in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Antonino Rocca. He became the prototype for the Lucha Libre style of acrobatic moves, fast-paced action, and—of course—masked grapplers. On top of that, El Santo became a mainstream movie star in Mexico, starring in a series of films, including action, adventure, horror, and comedies. And he wore his mask in every one!

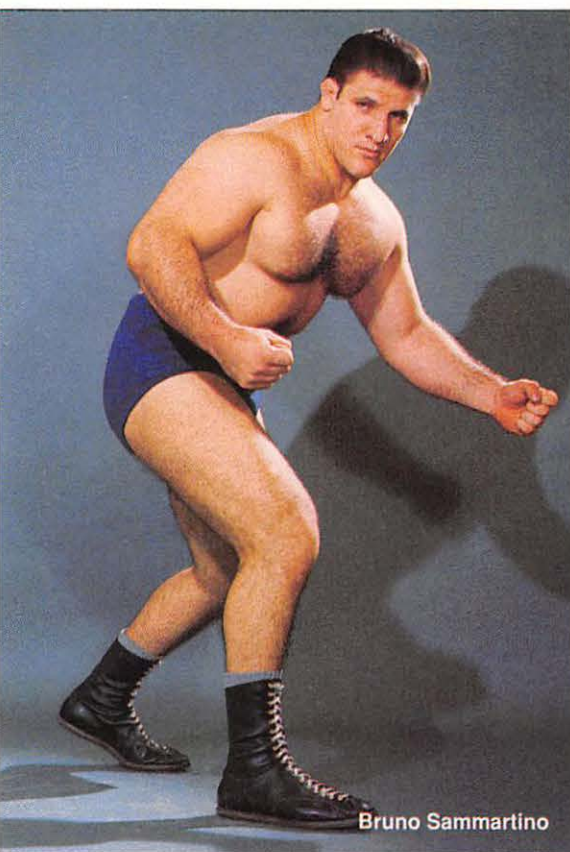
Buddy ROGERS

The original "Nature Boy," Buddy Rogers added style to wrestling. With his blond hair, superb physique, and patented strut, Rogers was unlike any other wrestler before him. He was more dangerous than Gorgeous George, and perhaps even more arrogant. Rogers won the NWA World title from Pat O'Connor at Comiskey Park in 1961 in front of more than 30,000 fans. He perfected the figure-four leglock and used it to beat the likes of O'Connor, Thesz, Ilio DiPaolo, and many more. Fittingly, Rogers was the first WWWF champion, starting that promotion with flash and character. Ric Flair

El Santo



The Evolution of **WRESTLING** [1960s]



Bruno Sammartino

Bruno SAMMARTINO

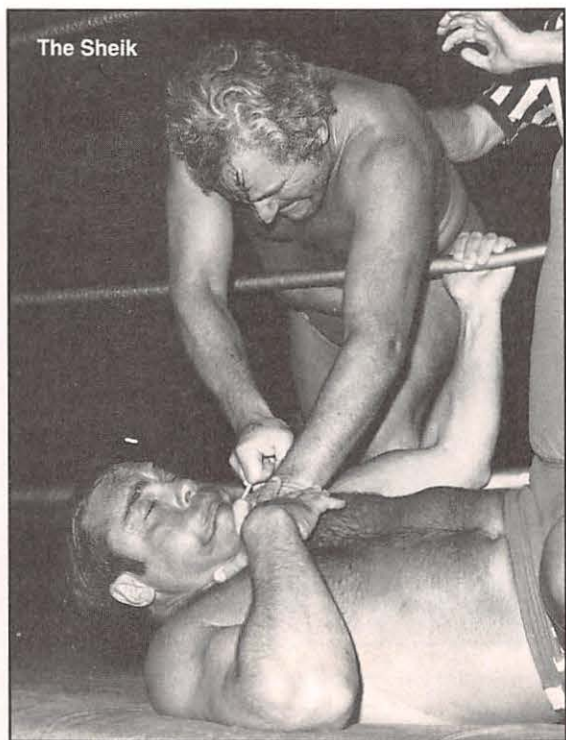
"The Living Legend" was the face of the WWWF from 1963 through 1971. The powerful Abruzzi, Italy, native destroyed Buddy Rogers to win the WWWF World title in 1963, needing less than a minute to make the "Nature Boy" submit to his backbreaker. Sammartino was an absolute powerhouse, defeating opponent after opponent with sheer muscle. He was considered to be the most powerful wrestler of the decade, bench-pressing more than 500 pounds and squatting 700 pounds in his prime. Bruno was beloved by the fans and

held the World title for an unprecedented 7½ years, followed by a second reign from 1973 to 1977. He was a pioneer in power wrestling.

The SHEIK

The Sheik was a unique new type of heel. He knew virtually no technical moves. He wasn't a powerhouse. In fact, the only things that really made him stand out were his maniacal eyes and the deep layers of scar tissue on his forehead. The Sheik terrorized opponents (and fans) like no other sadistic wrestler in history. Almost every one of his matches degenerated into a gorefest, with blood splattering the ring. The Sheik hid razor blades in his taped fingers, and would viciously puncture opponents with concealed weapons and bursts of flame. The Sheik went

The Sheik

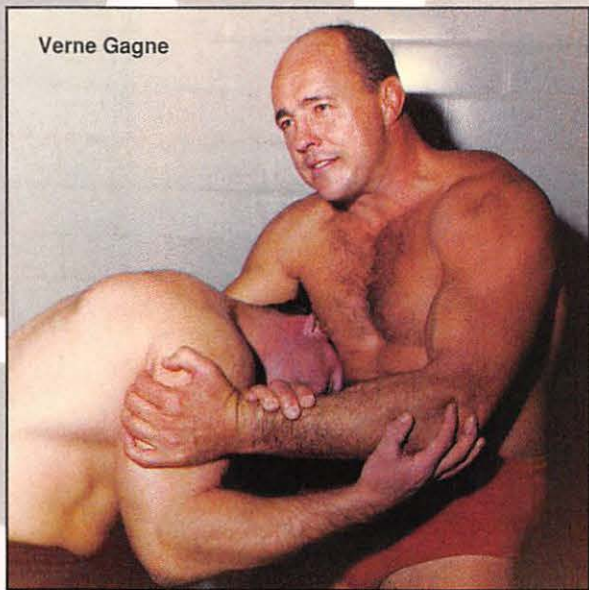


undefeated in the Detroit territory throughout the decade.

Verne GAGNE

Here was yet another amateur standout that made the transition to pro wrestling.

Verne Gagne





ting. On August 16, 1960, he was awarded the newly formed AWA's World title because he was seen as wrestling's "true" uncrowned champion. Gagne would go on to hold the AWA World title nine times. Gagne was known for his resilience and fortitude, as well as his sleeperhold. He owned the AWA and helped build it into a world-class organization, largely due to the efforts of his most dependable wrestler: Vern Gagne, who reigned as champion for roughly 12 years.

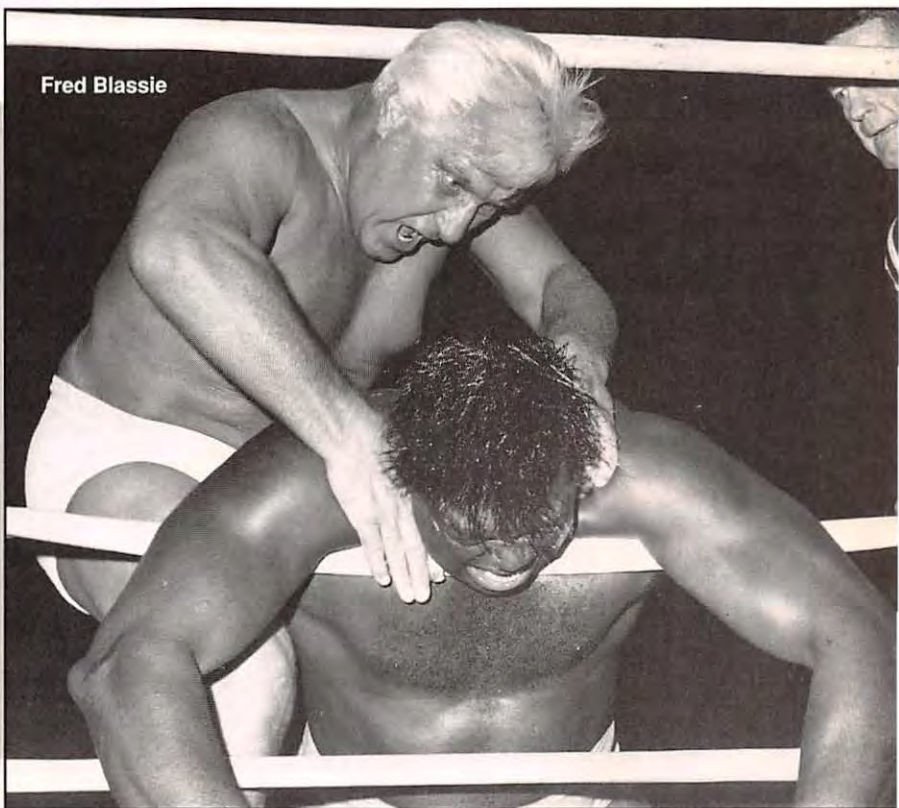
Shohei "GIANT" BABA

Consider Shohei Baba the Japanese equivalent of Andre the Giant. Standing seven feet tall, Baba had an unorthodox physique, with smallish arms and a non-muscular chest. But Baba's appearance belied his tremendous natural strength. His chops were powerful enough to stagger any opponent. He became the top competitor in All-Japan Pro Wrestling (the company he owned) and received title

shots against visiting NWA champions. And Baba made the most of those shots. On December 2, 1974, he defeated Jack Brisco for the title. He regained the title twice more, in 1979 and 1980, for a total of three World title reigns lasting a combined 20 days.

Fred BLASSIE

As "The Vampire," Fred Blassie could have given The Sheik a run as the most bloodthirsty wrestler of the 1960s. However, another one of Blassie's innovations was what landed him on this list. Blassie was wrestling's first truly great interview. He taunted his enemies and called the fans "pencil neck geeks." Blassie was the first great trash-talking wrestler. In fact, Muhammad Ali has admitted he patterned himself after two wrestlers: Gorgeous George (for the showmanship) and Fred Blassie (for the verbal sparring).

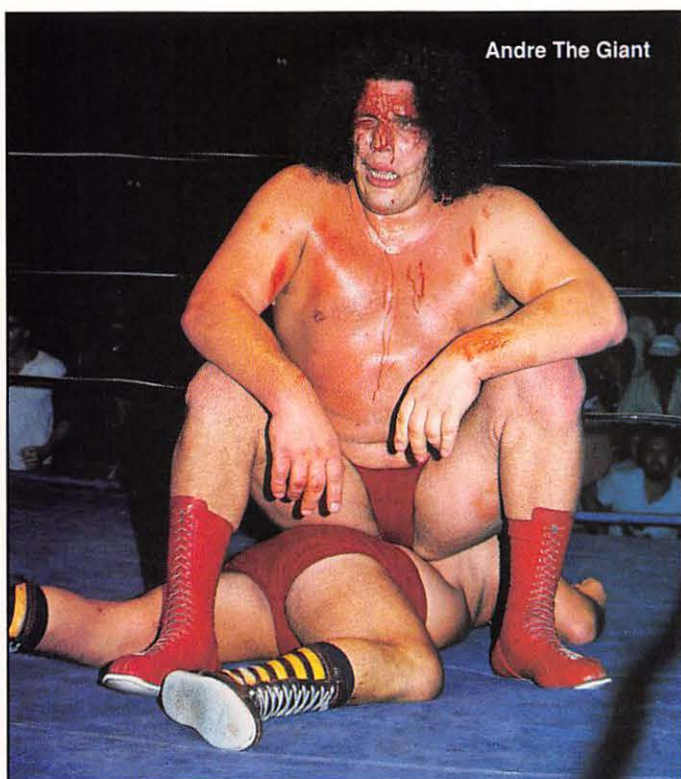


The Evolution of **WRESTLING** [1970s]



Andre **THE GIANT**

Andre the Giant was larger than life ... in more ways than one. Billed at 7'5" and weighing up to 525 pounds, he was the largest wrestler of his time. However, Andre was about more than sheer size. Early in his career, he could throw an impressive dropkick, and he had deceptive speed for such a humongous man. Throughout the 1970s, he was the gentle giant, a perennial fan favorite brought in to even the odds for an overmatched ally. His size, strength, and personality made him an international mainstream star. He will forever be the standard by which all other giants are measured.



Andre The Giant

Superstar **GRAHAM**

"Superstar" Billy Graham became a pro wrestler after a successful career as a bodybuilder. Dressed in bright tie-dyed clothing and forever showing off his "22-

inch pythons," Graham broke the traditional bad guy mold by developing a cult fan following. On April 30, 1977, Graham did the seemingly impossible and beat Bruno

Sammartino for the WWWF title. Graham held that belt for almost 10 months, making him the first heel to have a sustained WWWF World title reign. He nearly defeated Harley Race in a 1978 WWWF/NWA title unification match that ended in a draw. Hulk Hogan, Scott Steiner, and Jesse Ventura were influenced by Graham's look and persona.



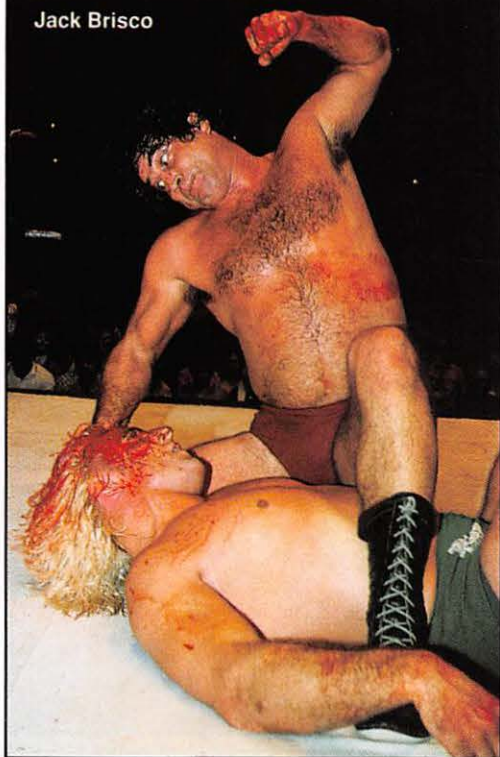
Superstar Graham

Jack **BRISCO**

Prior to turning pro, Jack Brisco was a championship collegiate wrestler. On July 20, 1973, he needed all of his amateur training and superior conditioning to defeat Harley Race to win his first NWA World title. Brisco was a master of takedowns and submission wres-



Jack Brisco



but in truth, Inoki's stiff kicks had damaged Ali's legs.

Dory FUNK JR.

Dory Funk Jr. was a young man (27) when he defeated Gene Kiniski for the NWA World title in 1969, but he wasn't what you would call part of the Woodstock generation. Funk was a no-frills grappling machine. A superior mat wrestler, Funk picked a body part and patiently worked it over, weakening his opponent to a point at which he could eventually take the win. Due in part to

Antonio Inoki



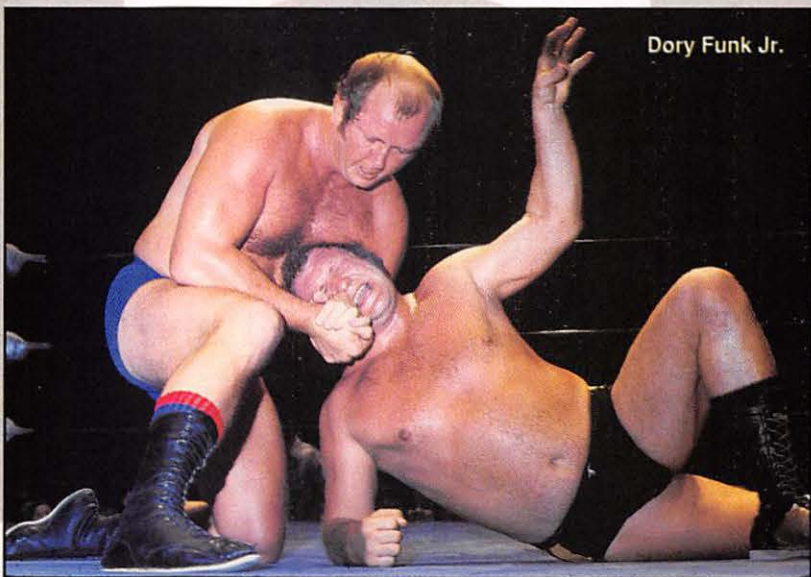
ting, and was able to successfully transition from the mats to the ring. Brisco lost and regained the title from Shohei Baba before finally dropping the belt for good in 1975. Clean-cut and well-spoken, Brisco also knew when to break the rules for his own gain. He believed in letting his actions speak a lot louder than his words.

Antonio INOKI

In Japan, Antonio Inoki is known for his legendary in-ring career and his role in shaping New Japan Pro Wrestling. In fact, Inoki even defeated Bob Backlund for the WWF World title on November 30, 1979. Backlund regained the belt a week later, and the switch was never acknowledged in the U.S. On these shores, Inoki will always be remembered for his June 25, 1976, battle against Muhammad Ali. In a bout that pitted wrestler against boxer, Inoki avoided Ali's punches by crawling around the ring and kicking at Ali's legs. The match went to a 15-round draw and was panned by the press,

his finisher, the spinning toe-hold, Funk held the NWA title from February 11, 1969, to May 24, 1973. His style was never flashy, but it was always effective. He put winning above all else.

Dory Funk Jr.



The Evolution of **WRESTLING** [1980s]



Hulk HOGAN

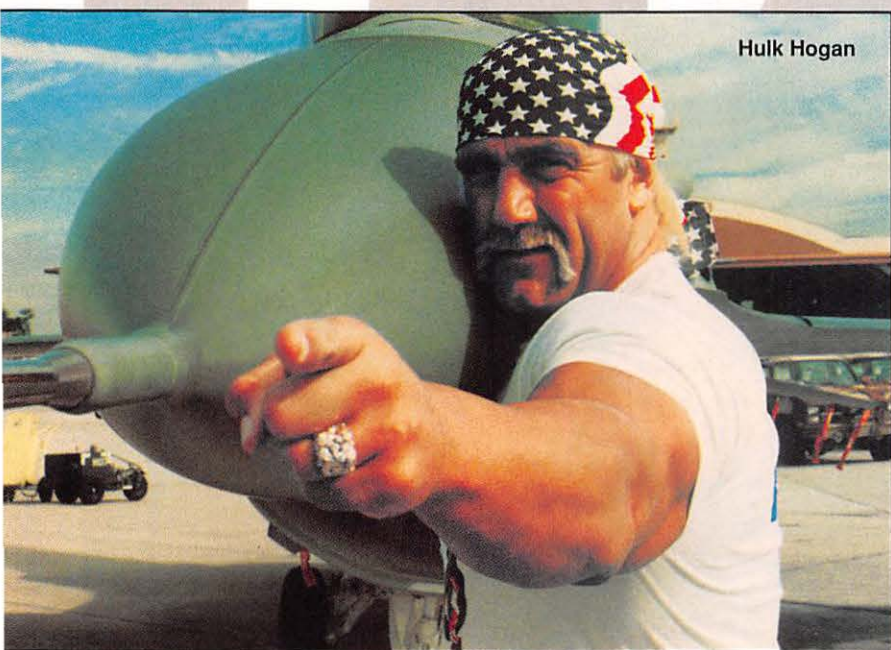
The "Hulkster" stormed into America's consciousness with his role in 1983's *Rocky III*. Standing 6'8" and weighing 302 pounds, Hogan came to embody truth, justice, and the American way. His charisma and appeal were unmatched. With Vince McMahon's shrewd marketing, Hogan was the public face of pro wrestling in the 1980s. Hogan was a larger-than-life figure, forever battling the forces of evil and vanquishing them with a mighty bodyslam, boot to the face, and legdrop. Hogan was the first wrestler to appeal both to children and adults alike on such a grand scale. He also helped wrestling break through to mainstream audiences with his appearances on *The Tonight Show* and in *Sports Illustrated*.



Ric FLAIR

The "Nature Boy" was face of the National Wrestling Alliance throughout the 1980s. A technical wrestler par excellence (and a master of the figure-four leglock),

Flair preferred to torment opponents through psychological warfare, and his charisma was undeniable. Flair was a master technician. He won the NWA World title seven times during the 1980s and was named Wrestler of the Decade by the editors of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*. Flair was a truly dominant heel champion, but he always seemed slightly vulnerable, giving the impression that he *could* lose the belt at any time. But after every title loss, he became even more dangerous. Capable of going 60 (and sometimes even 90) minutes on a given night, Flair was a brilliant ring strategist who always knew how to make both himself and his opponent look fantastic.



The ROAD WARRIORS

Hawk and Animal dominated the wrestling world like no tag team ever before. With their fantastic physiques, fearsome face paint, and spiked shoulder pads, they were a shot of pure adrenaline, running to the ring and destroying opponents in mere minutes at most. The Road Warriors held the AWA



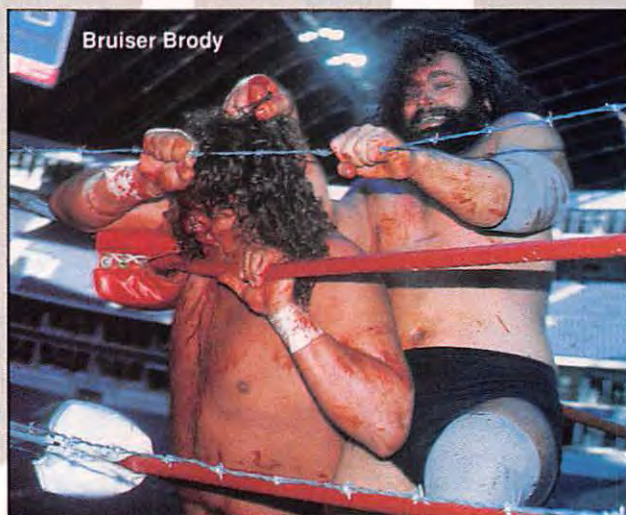
The Road Warriors



tag title from August 1984 to September 1985 before heading to the NWA. There they won the tag title in 1988 and competed in Japan. The Road Warriors were voted Tag Team of the Year by the readers of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* in 1983, 1984, 1985, and 1988, setting a new gold standard in tag team dominance.

Bruiser BRODY

Bruiser Brody was the last of a breed of journeyman independent wrestlers. Even though he was a tremendous draw and headlined with the WWF, AWA, and NWA, Brody refused to sign long-term contracts with any promotion so he would not relinquish control of his character to any promoter. With his wild hair flying and a metal chain



Bruiser Brody

first wrestlers to be cheered even when he wrestled in a traditional heel style.

Tiger MASK

Even though Tiger Mask established himself as the premier light heavyweight in Japan in the early-1980s, American wrestling fans had no idea what to expect from the masked superstar when he toured the States in 1983 and 1984. Tiger Mask's high-flying, reversal-filled contests against Dynamite Kid and The Cobra were like nothing American fans had ever seen. Even though they didn't know much about him, thousands watched in awe as Tiger Mask executed flying bodypresses outside the ring and stiff suplexes in the ring. Tiger Mask stood in the face of the "bigger is

better" 1980s mentality, and his brief U.S. tours helped wipe away the negative stereotypes of Japanese wrestlers that had persisted since World War II. Not only was it okay to cheer for Tiger Mask, you couldn't help but cheer for him.

swinging recklessly over his head, Brody was a sensation in Japan and Puerto Rico. He was one of the few American competitors to headline shows in Japan. Bottom line, he was one of the greatest brawlers and most fearless and intimidating wrestlers anywhere, and one of the



Tiger Mask

The Evolution of **WRESTLING** [1990s]



Shawn Michaels

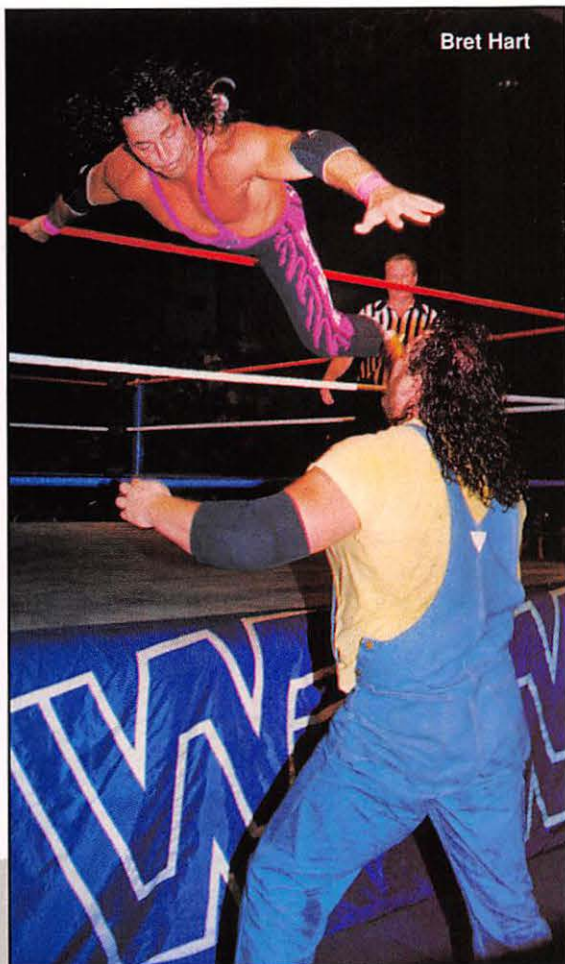
Shawn MICHAELS

"The Heart-break Kid" is the smallest and, arguably, quickest champion in WWE history. Michaels seized the stage when Kevin Nash and Scott Hall were preparing to flee the promotion for WCW, and established himself as "The Showstopper" by increasing the pace of WWF championship matches and routinely defeating foes that outweighed him by more than 100 pounds. Michaels made no secret he was driven by ego. He truly wanted to be the most exciting wrestler

of all-time. It helped that he had Bret Hart to push him.

Bret HART

Once upon a time, Bret Hart was considered a tag team wrestler. He was just too small to compete for a heavyweight championship. But Hart proved all his critics wrong. Using the skills he learned in father Stu's famous Dungeon, the "Hit-man" proved to be one of the most successful champions ever. Hart was a throwback to the Bob Backlund era, in which a smaller wrestler with strong technical skills could be accepted as WWF World champion. Hart may have been the most believable and genuine WWF champion ever. He competed in slightly slower

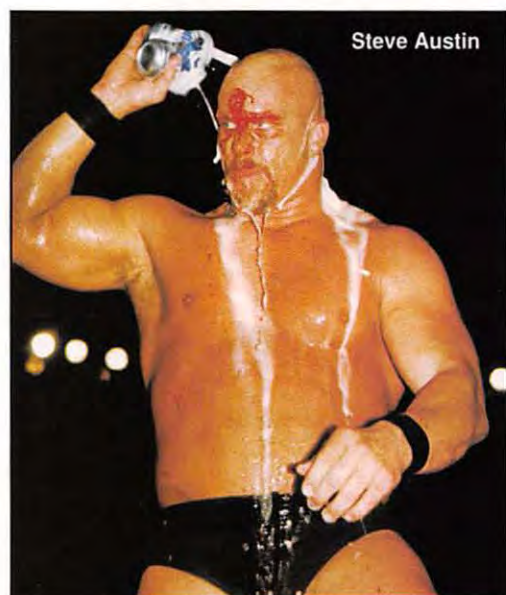


Bret Hart

matches, heavy with ring psychology, and brought credibility to an era overcrowded with ridiculous gimmicks.

Steve AUSTIN

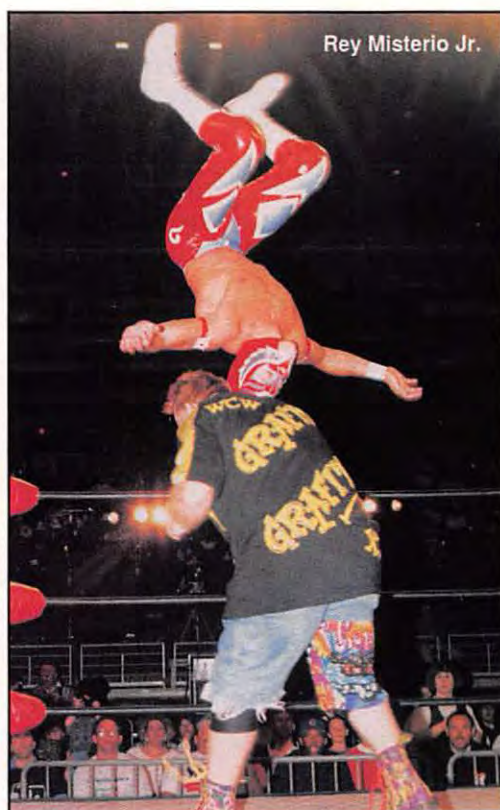
"Stone-Cold" became a household name by becoming wrestling's first big anti-hero. By conventional standards, he should have been a heel (and was for a while). He swore, he attacked potential allies, he drank countless beers in the ring—you name the rule, and Austin shattered it. But Austin's charisma was undeniable. Like McMurphy in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, Austin brazenly defied all authority. His feud with Vince McMahon helped the WWF win the ratings war against WCW and set the standard in



Steve Austin

Rey MISTERIO JR.

Prior to the 1990s, it was next to impossible to find a famous pro wrestler in the U.S. weighing less than 200 pounds. When 140-pound Rey Misterio Jr. broke through, first in ECW and then in WCW, that all changed. Misterio showed that sometimes a great little man (he was mistaken for a young fan in a dressing room more than once) *could* beat a good big man. He helped popularize the high-flying, high-risk Mexican style in the U.S. and was largely responsible for making cruiserweight wrestling a sensation. Rey's daredevil antics and fearlessness against larger opponents forced fans to overcome any negative stereotypes about smaller Latino wrestlers, and he helped raise the bar on what could be done in a wrestling ring.

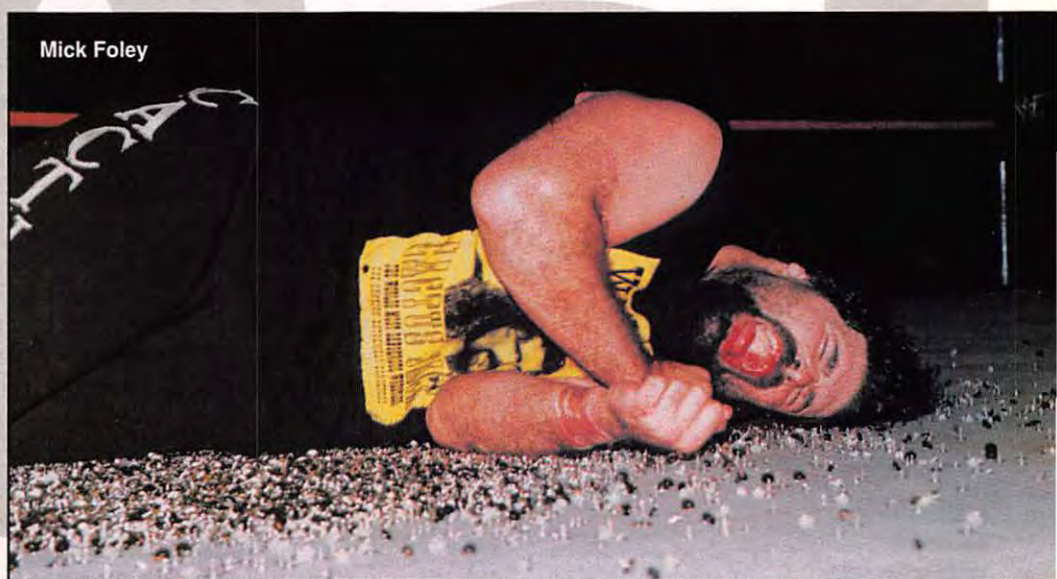


Rey Misterio Jr.

protagonist vs. corrupt executive storylines. "The Bionic Redneck" achieved unprecedented popularity, and his Stone-Cold stunner became one of the most imitated and emulated finishers in the business.

Mick FOLEY

Mrs. Foley's baby boy never looked like a superstar pro wrestler. In his own words, he looked more like a refrigerator repairman than a gladiator. But Foley had personality. And he had desire. And he had charisma. Being a pro wrestler was his lifelong dream, and that dream touched a chord with millions of fans sharing the same dream. Foley graduated from wrestling in the backyard to absorbing superhuman amounts of pain and becoming the King of the Death Match. He forced people to take notice of him by taking bumps off the tops of cages and piledrivers on thumbtacks. Foley helped popularize the extreme style in the U.S. and gave hope to aspiring backyard wrestlers everywhere.



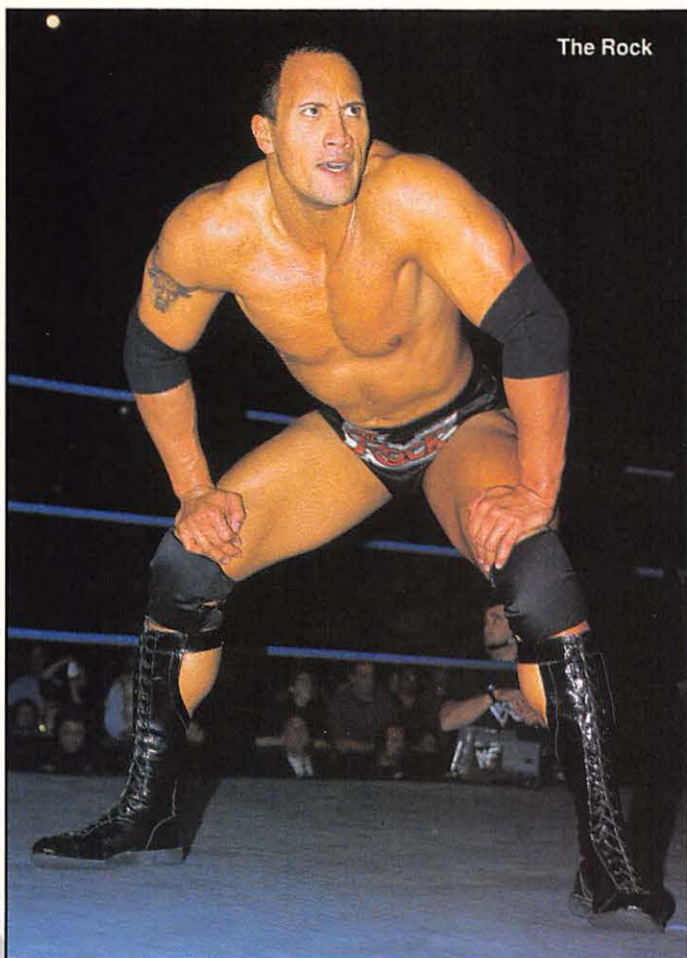
Mick Foley

The Evolution of **WRESTLING** [2000s]



The ROCK

The Rock is wrestling's ultimate superhero, a character that truly transcends wrestling. He has taken the mantle of mainstream celebrity from Hulk Hogan, then infused a badly needed "hipness" into the public perception of the industry. Even as a part-time wrestler, The Rock makes wrestling look good to the mainstream. He is articulate and (literally) has movie star good looks. As far as in-ring work goes, The Rock understands the value of equal parts athleticism and showmanship, not to mention promo skills. He combined the best of Freddie Blassie with the best of Hulk Hogan and wrapped it all up in with a cockeyed smirk, creating one of the most entertaining characters ever.



The Rock

Chris **JERICO**

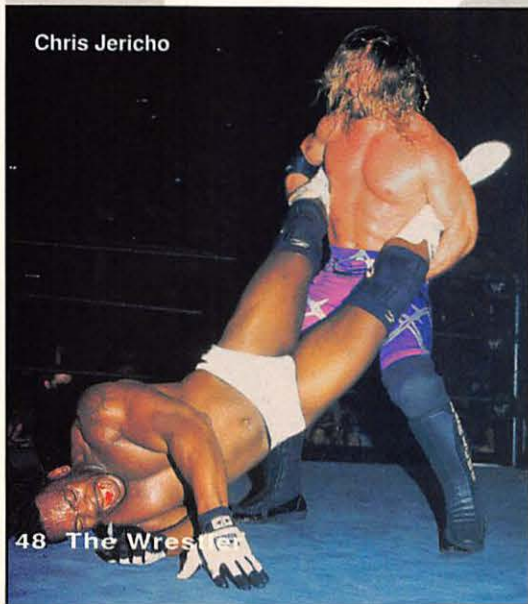
The self-proclaimed "King Of The World" will forever hold a place in wrestling history for being the man that unified the WWF and WCW world titles, but he rarely gets the kind of respect from the fans that accomplishment affords. Y2J has always been his own best promoter, and his incessant boasts overshadow his greatest accomplishments. Jericho plays the cowardly heel role well, but he also thrills the fans with Lucha Libre-style maneuvers. His versatility is perhaps his most

remarkable asset. Even though the fans despise him now, they recognize that he's capable of drawing a great match out of just about any opponent, regardless of size or style.

Kurt ANGLE

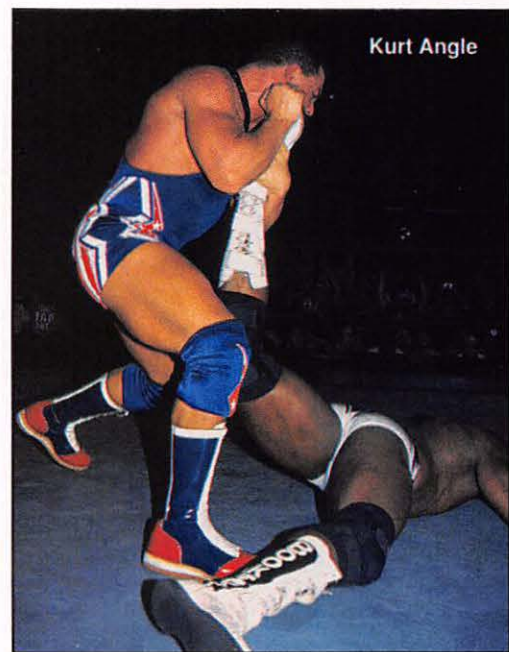
The 1996 Olympic gold medalist has become the prototype for pro wrestlers in the 21st century. Angle is equally adept at playing babyface and heel, straight man and comedian, and his knowledge of mat-based technical grappling is unsurpassed. Angle ushered in an era of submission-based grappling and countermoves. He also re-established more basic submission holds as viable finishers, removing some of the 1980s stigma of a fan favorite never giving up to a heel's submission

Chris Jericho





Kurt Angle



package. The former NCAA champion is as technically skilled as almost anyone in WWE. He can even execute a shooting star press. Lesnar became the youngest champion in WWE history and ushered in an era in which even the powerhouses were expected to have solid wrestling skills. Along with Kurt Angle, he has also made pro wrestling a more attractive career option to amateur standouts.

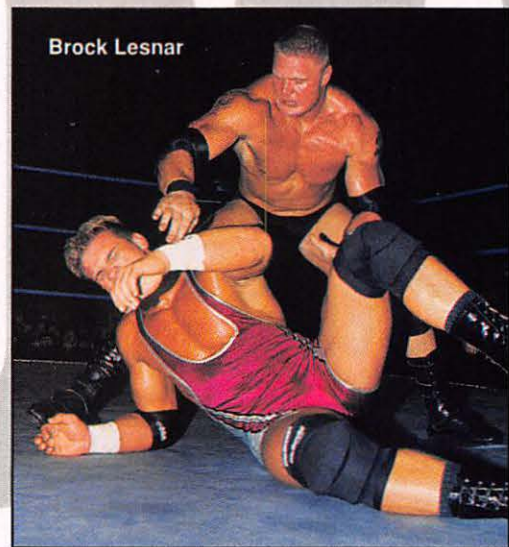
TRIPLE-H

"The Game" has the best of both worlds. Like Ric Flair, he is something of a cowardly heel that relies on outside interference whenever possible. But unlike most other heels in wrestling history, he's also a truly dominant champion. He is intense, a magnificent physical specimen, and surprisingly skilled in scientific wrestling. Unlike a lot of the traditional heels of the past, Triple-H doesn't seem to have any sort of Achilles heel (other than perhaps his susceptibility to injury), a fact that further infuriates the fans. Whether or not he's "that damn good" is debatable, but he is that damn hard to beat. □

Triple-H



Brock Lesnar



The Women Of Wrestling

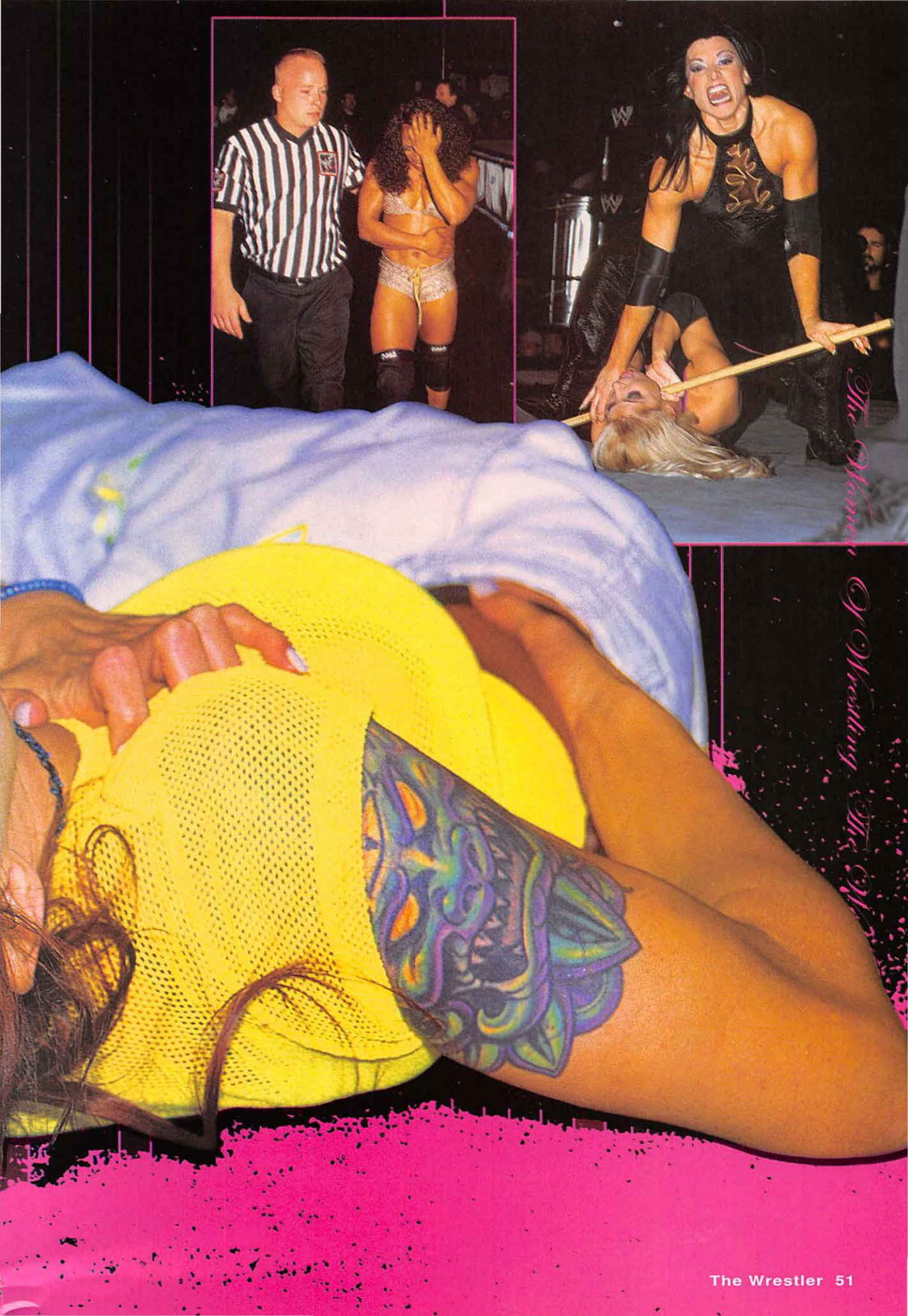
Do We Expect Too Much From Their Bodies?

By Will Welsh

SHE LANDS ON her back following a brainbuster, and intense pain explodes through her entire body. It's as if someone has taken a sledgehammer and driven it straight through her midsection, punishing her and knocking every ounce of wind out of her muscular frame. All she can think about is catching her breath, making that crucial oxygen flow through her body—but at this very moment, it seems as if that's the hardest thing she has ever tried to do.

Finally, she gasps. Her lungs fill. Her opponent, sensing that something is wrong, urges her to "just get through the match," but that seems like an impossibility. *What am I supposed to do?* she wonders. She can't breathe and can barely walk. (After the match, she is told that as she tried to continue, she looked like she was trying to tiptoe from one end of the





The Women Of Wrestling: The CW

*Years ago,
a wrestling
diva just had to
look good in a
revealing outfit
and maybe
interfere here
and there.
That's not
nearly enough
in 2003.
Looking good
is only one of
the requirements
for being a diva
today. The
others are even
more taxing*

ring to the other.) But rather than just giving up then and there, she remembers her training, the feeling that she must be tougher than everyone else. Even the guys! She *must* continue. So she ignores the catcalls in the crowd and the pain wracking her body. Somehow, with her body attempting to shut down on her, she finishes the match.

When it's over, in the backstage area, her body finally quits on her, and she vomits. Then she vomits again. She's taken to the hospital, where she's eventually told that she has suffered a broken L1 in her lower back and a fractured tailbone—injuries that would prevent most people from getting out of bed, let alone trying to finish a professional wrestling match. She would be spending at least the next six weeks in a back brace that stretches from her waist all the way to her neck.

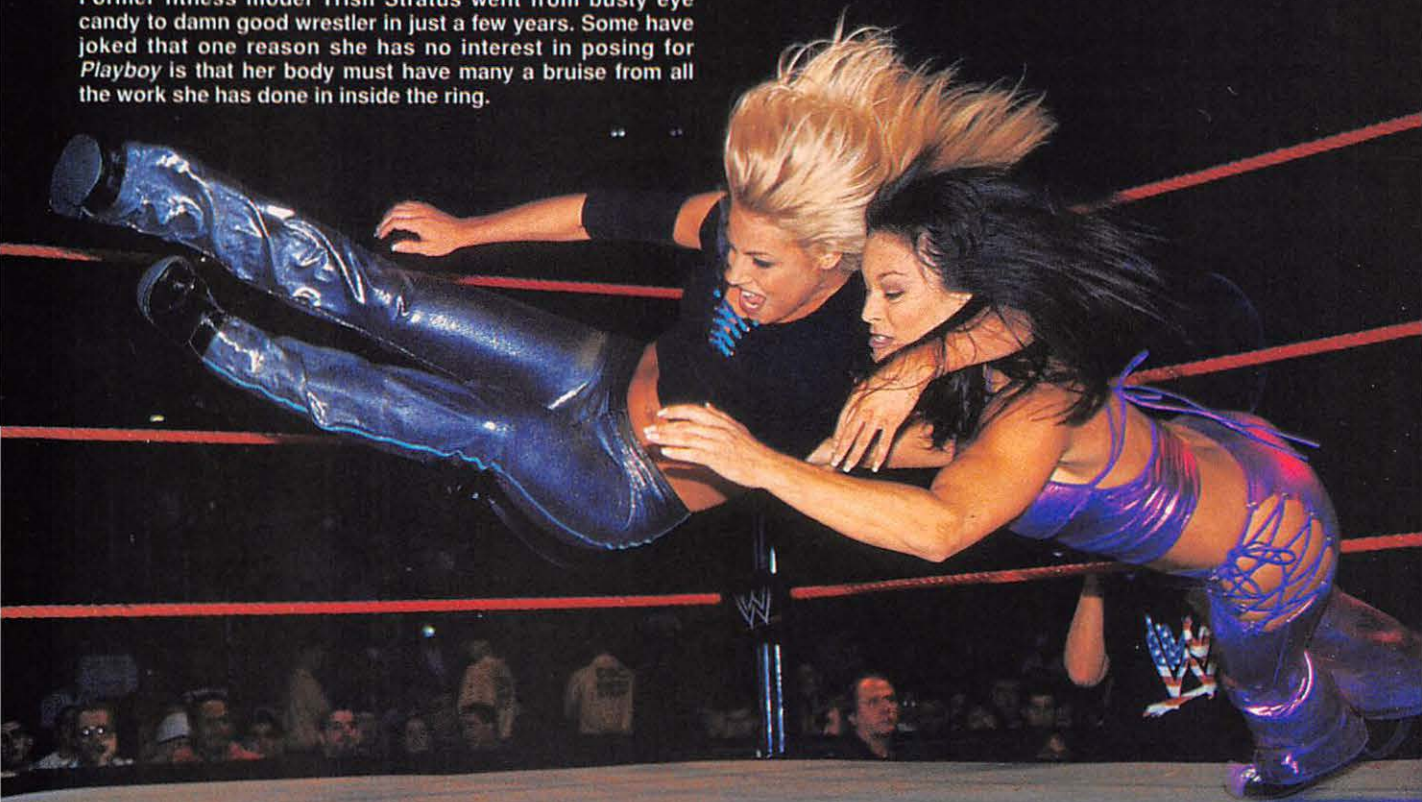
The above scenario is real. It's what Kim "Desire" Neilson experienced on the night of June 11, 2003, during a match against Mercedes that was being taped for NWA-TNA's syndicated show, *Xplosion*.

Ten years ago, in 1993, WWE didn't put one—not *one*—women's match on pay-per-view. Neither did WCW. Five years ago, in 1998, WWE featured four women's matches on its pay-per-view broadcasts. WCW? None.

How times have changed. WWE now regularly books women's matches for *Raw* and *Smackdown*, and it's a real rarity if the *Raw* pay-per-views don't feature a match for the women's championship. For its part, NWA-TNA has also emphasized women wrestlers, such as Alexis Laree, Neilson, Trinity, Tracy, and Veronica. And if these women aren't featured on the pay-per-view broadcast this week, it's probably because they wrestled a match for *Xplosion*.

Yes, women are wrestling again—and they're doing it at an unbelievably high level. The women wrestlers of today are as good—pound-for-pound—as many of their male counterparts and even better than some. Like the men, they pride themselves on their physiques and their ability to wrestle technically sound, highly physical matches. They don't want to be the best women

Former fitness model Trish Stratus went from busty eye candy to damn good wrestler in just a few years. Some have joked that one reason she has no interest in posing for *Playboy* is that her body must have many a bruise from all the work she has done in inside the ring.



wrestlers they can be—they want to be the best *wrestlers* they can be, sexism be damned.

No, the women of today aren't content with simply escorting their men to the ring.

A lot of the change in women's wrestling is directly related to the women who are now in the ring. In years past, women who were involved with wrestling were generally involved for one of two reasons:

1. They were involved with a wrestler who got them into the business.

2. They were lifelong fans.

Now, however, the women who are entering the sport are coming from the outside, and more and more often, "from the outside" means from the world of fitness modeling and competing. Neilson, Trish Stratus, Victoria, Torrie Wilson, and a host of other women wrestlers have backgrounds in fitness modeling, and if the trend continues, there will be more fitness competitors on the way.

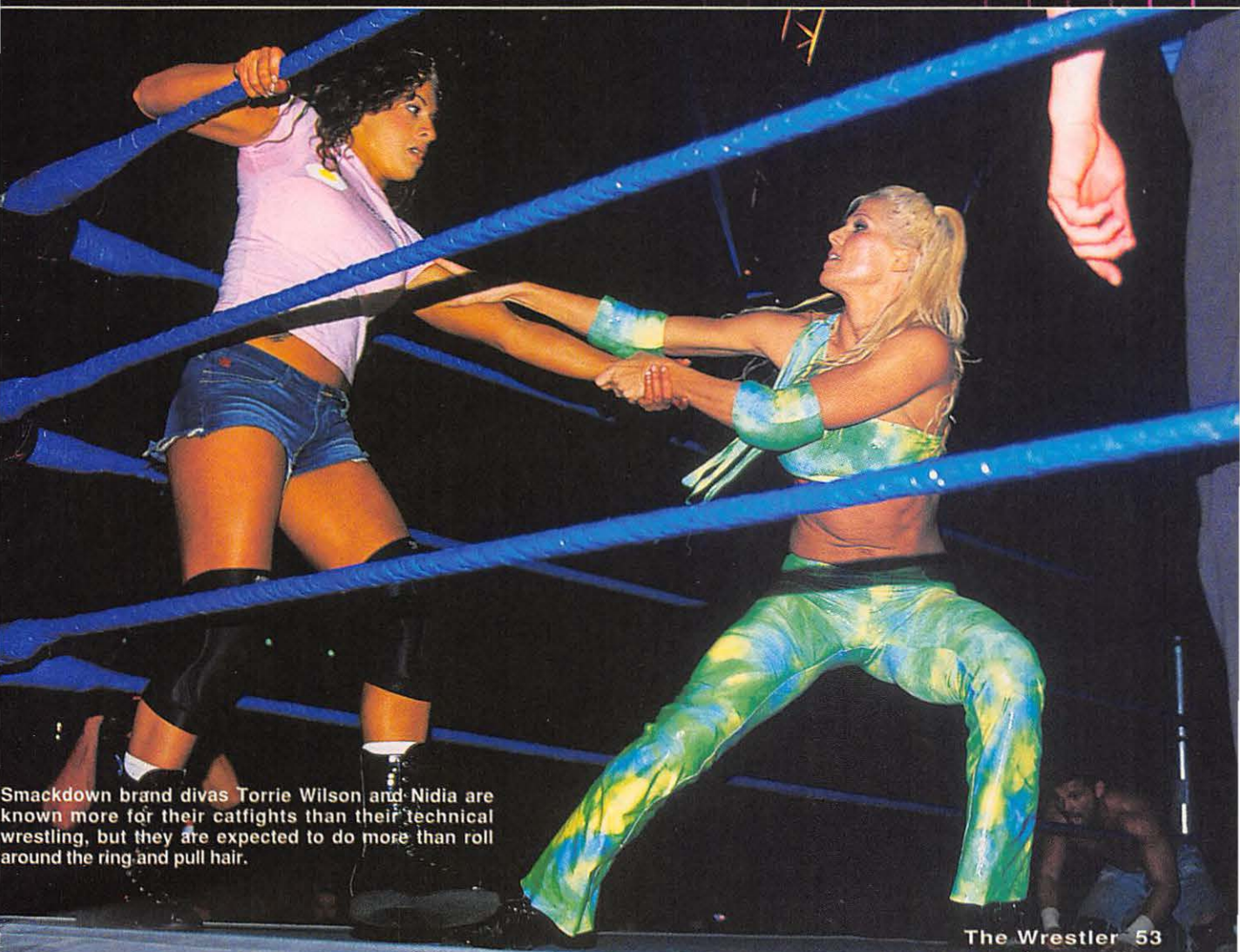
This is a good thing. A strong contingent of quality, sexy, physically fit women wrestlers will not only increase wrestling's female fan base, but it'll also help to keep most of its male fans happy. However, this isn't without risks. Women wrestlers, striving to make as much of an impact as possible, are taking a few bumps they probably shouldn't be taking and putting their bodies in increasingly dangerous positions.

Former ECW valet Francine Fournier, who often got herself caught up in the goings-on of charges such as Shane Douglas and Tommy Dreamer, is one of the most authoritative voices when it comes to what can happen to women who take regular bumps. Though she didn't wrestle too many official matches, she was often the victim of pile-drivers and various other brutal high-impact maneuvers, and nearly three years after the demise of ECW, she's still feeling the aftereffects.

"I have a lot of arthritis throughout



The gorgeous Kim "Desire" Neilson wasn't feeling so gorgeous after suffering a very serious back injury in TNA in June. She won't be quitting as a result, however.



Smackdown brand divas Torrie Wilson and Nidia are known more for their catfights than their technical wrestling, but they are expected to do more than roll around the ring and pull hair.

my body," Fournier, now a regular with Major League Wrestling and Delaware Championship Wrestling, told **THE WRESTLER**. "I have good days and bad days. I don't know how full-time wrestlers do it night after night, because just managing and taking the bumps I did have taken a toll on my body. I've been lucky, because it could always be worse, and I thank God every day for me not being seriously injured."

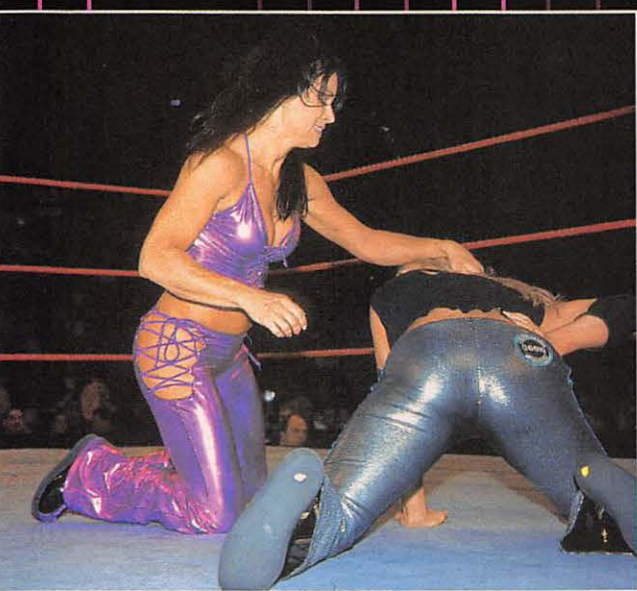
As noted above, Kim Neilson was seriously injured. A broken L1 and a fractured

tailbone simply aren't the kind of injuries that mend overnight. They take weeks (and sometimes months) to heal, and they can cause complications that recur for a lifetime. Unbelievably, Neilson has no plans to give up wres-

tling. She plans to come back just as soon as she's physically, mentally, and emotionally able.

Where does this kind of resilience come from? Maybe it comes from her days as a fitness model and competitor, when part of every day was spent training in an effort to look as close to perfect as possible. Maybe it comes from a perfectionist mindset—which almost every fitness model needs in order to be successful. Or maybe it comes from her wrestling training, which constantly taught her that weakness isn't rewarded.

"I wanted to get involved with wrestling because I didn't have the gymnastics background for the fitness competitions, so I inquired about WCW's Power Plant," she recalled. "But after 30 days, WCW was sold. Ray Lloyd (Glacier) said that I should go to Dusty Rhodes' training camp, so that's what I did. I was training with all men, and I can remember thinking that because I was coming from a fitness background, I had to be extra



Her beauty and determination have won the lovely Trish a lot of male admirers (below), though a lot of female fans surely respect her toughness and resilience (above). She's no girly girl!



tough—more tough than the guys. I knew I had to prove myself. One day, I broke my rib, and I just kept telling myself, 'Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry.' When I finally got into my car, I burst into tears."

Guess we know where she found the strength to finish that TNA match.

Of course, injuries aren't the only potential problems that wrestling's divas face. They're employed by promotions who have hired them in large part for their looks, no matter what wrestling officials say to the contrary. (And let there be no argument: It's the same with the men. A killer physique can still get you very far in this industry.) If a wrestling diva gets injured to the point at which she's no longer attractive, well, it's possible that the wrestling officials she devoted herself to impressing will let her go without a second's thought ... and make room for another aspiring diva.

"Wrestling women are sometimes put into the same category as models," said Fournier. "If they gain a little weight, everyone jumps all over them. Same if someone loses weight. Appearance is important, but I feel you don't have to fit the supermodel mold as long as you have talent to back you up. Not everyone can look like a Barbie doll—and they shouldn't have to."

No, they shouldn't have to, but looking around wrestling these days, there aren't too many women who *wouldn't* look good packaged in Barbie's famous pink plastic box. In fact, packaged as a Barbie, most of today's wrestling divas would probably become top sellers.

In the end, maybe women's wrestling is all about smoke and mirrors—just like so much of the other stuff surrounding the sport. Women wrestle, injuries are suffered, and the sport moves on. During all of this, the women will get better and better and we'll get more accustomed to seeing them take bigger and more painful bumps. And at the end of the day (or, more than likely, at the beginning of the next day), when they show up for their photo shoot, they probably won't have any worries about what their bruises will look like when it comes time to view the finished product.

"When I show up for a photo shoot," laughed Neilson, "I just hope that whoever is shooting the photos has a good makeup artist and a good air brusher." □



Francine got used to hobbling around on crutches during the heyday of ECW. Serious injuries to female performers have become all too common in the last decade.

"I have a lot of arthritis throughout my body. I have good days and bad days. I don't know how full-time wrestlers do it night after night, because just managing and taking the bumps I did have taken a toll on my body."
—Francine

It used to be that pesky female managers/valets such as Lucy Furr (the former Daffney) would, at worst, get pulled around by the hair a bit if they interfered. Not anymore. They take poundings all the time. And they hit back, too!



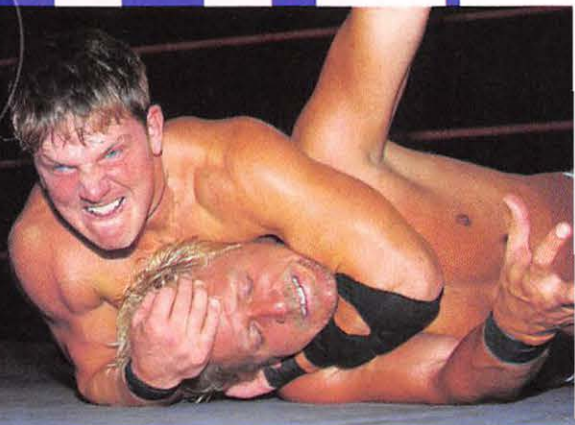
Now if you look for a reason why **A.J. Styles** won't be an outstanding champ, you might be looking for a while

HE BRINGS

STYLE

Ah, 1993. It's not just the year that saw Ric Flair win his last NWA championship. Oh, no. It's also the year that saw WCW officially withdraw from the NWA and change the name of the belt it had called NWA title to the WCW international title before unifying it with the WCW World title in June 1994. Only the NWA's decision to reclaim the title for itself and crown a new champion via tourna-

A.J. Styles A.J. Styles A.J. Styles A.J. Styles A.J. Styles A.J. Styles



A.J. Styles still doesn't have the national name recognition that Jeff Jarrett, a WWF and WCW veteran, does. That doesn't mean he won't be a more effective NWA champion.



Styles is content to join with other heels such as Sean Waltman against Jeff Jarrett in TNA, but he is sincere about bringing honor and prestige to his newly won championship.



BACK TO THE NWA TITLE

A.J. has respect for the sport—past, present, & future

Styles is young, fresh, alive, and in charge of his career.

He's not settling for second best. He's not the NWA champion because a bigger, more important promotion hasn't come calling (because it has). He's the NWA champion because that's what he'd rather be than anything else in the entire world.

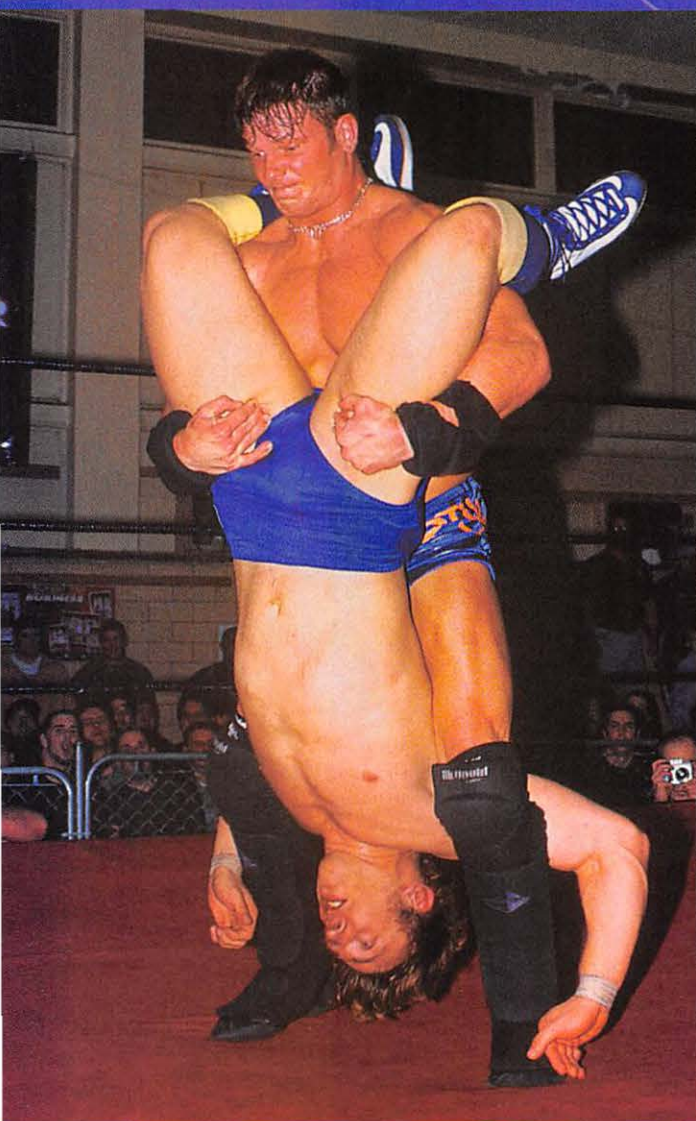
ment later that year saved it from being something found solely in history books.

Since that tournament (which saw Chris Candido beat Tracey Smothers to become the champion), there have been 15 NWA champions—some you probably have heard of (Sabu, Ken Shamrock, Jeff Jarrett), and some you probably haven't (Gary Steele, Naoya Ogawa).

A.J. Styles, the current NWA champion, might just be the most important of them all.

How did this happen? How has Styles become the most important NWA champion of the past decade? It's pretty simple, really. He's not a former champion from a fallen promotion like Sabu, Steve Corino, or Jarrett. He's not an unknown commodity like Ogawa, Dan Severn, Gary Steele, Mike Rapada (a.k.a. Colorado Kid), or Shinya Hashimoto. (Hashimoto is a three-time IWGP heavyweight champion and the reigning All-Japan Triple Crown champion, but in North America the only thing that earns you is a strong fan base among tape traders.) And he's not a washout from another promotion like Ron Killings.

In other words, Styles is young, fresh, alive, and in charge of his career. He's not settling for second best. He's not the NWA champion because a bigger, more important promotion hasn't come calling (because it has). He's the NWA champion because that's what



The Georgia native has already defended the NWA title on shows promoted by Ring of Honor, where he'll be able to face top-notch competition such as American Dragon (above left) and fellow TNA star Chris Daniels (above right) in the future.

he'd rather be than anything else in the entire world.

"Being the NWA champion means a lot," Styles said. "I've lived for this moment. But not only do I have to go out and deliver quality matches and wins, I also have to show that my name sitting alongside all those names of previous NWA champions isn't a fluke. I have to show that my name belongs up there, and that it will belong up there in the future. The last thing I want my reign as NWA champion to become is a joke five or 10 years down the line."

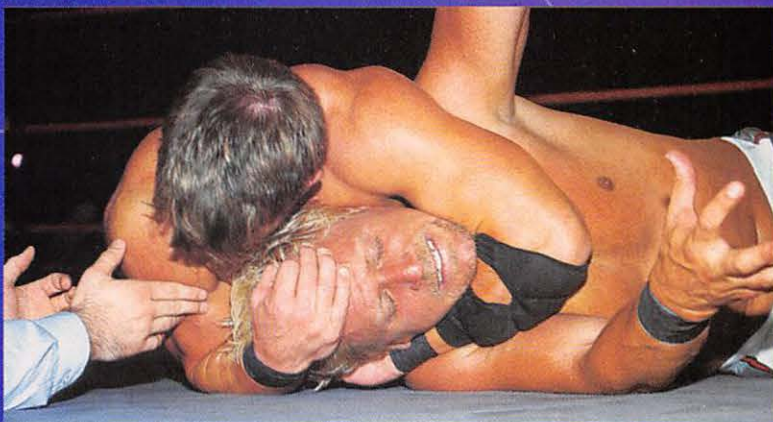
It's hard to believe that'll be the case, and that's mostly because of Styles' desire to become more than just another NWA champion. He wants to once again put the title on a pedestal. He wants to wrestle a match against a Jarrett or a Raven and have fans talk about it years later—just like fans talk about classics like Randy Savage vs. Rick Steamboat at WrestleMania III or Ric Flair vs. Sting at the first Clash of the Champions. He wants to get fans talking and keep them talking about him and about wrestling.

That's perhaps the most refreshing aspect of Styles' personality: He's a man who sees the bigger picture. When he enters a wrestling ring as the NWA champion, he knows that he's not only wrestling his opponent, but he's also wrestling the reputation of every previous NWA champion. If he wants to be respected like they were and are, he has to wrestle and wrestle well.

"The old cliché is that a champion's job is to put butts in the seats," Styles said, "but I think there's more to it than that. Certainly, a champion should help attract crowds, but he should also be a representative of the title's past and an indicator of where the title will be in the future—and not just where it will be, but how it will be regarded and respected. That's my job. I'm now a part of the NWA's legacy, and the only person who can hurt or improve upon that legacy while I have the title is me."

That's a lot of responsibility for a man with less than five years in the sport, and Styles knows it. But he also knows that the only way to surpass even your own expectations is by pushing yourself to your outermost limit—and then pushing further. It's an ability that only a special group of people possess, and Styles is one of those lucky few.

One day in the far-off future, a retired A.J. Styles will look back on his days in professional wrestling and recall his time as the NWA heavyweight champion. Maybe he'll pick up the *2033 Wrestling Almanac* and look through the names of all the champions he's



Other than that name recognition, there isn't much that Styles doesn't offer as NWA champ. He's a hard worker, great wrestler, solid talker, and he will travel!

linked to by way of the NWA title's legacy and, if our crystal ball is correct, he'll smile, because his name won't look out of place.

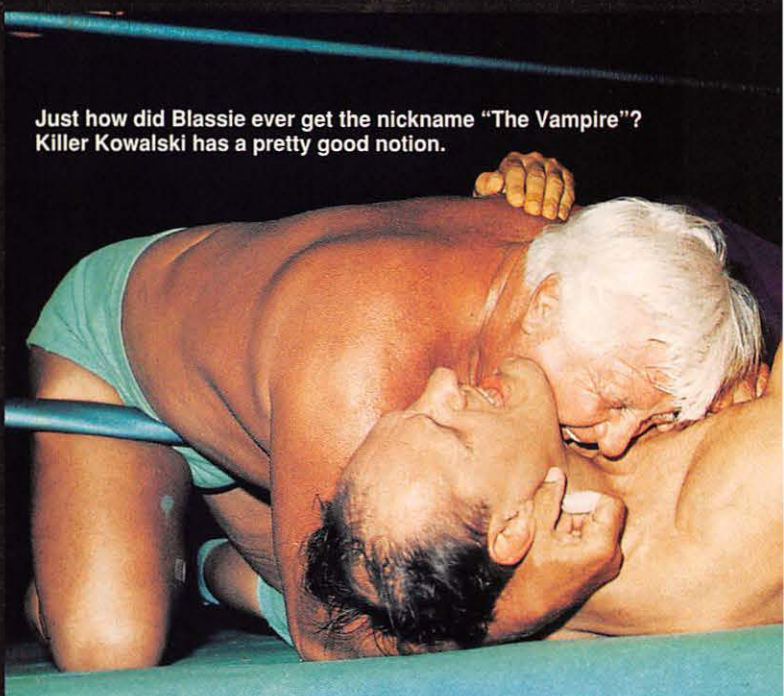
Not in the least. □



TNA would be wise to allow Styles to break free of Vince Russo. He doesn't need an overbearing personality like Vinny Ru overshadowing him and the belt.

Just how did Blassie ever get the nickname "The Vampire"? Killer Kowalski has a pretty good notion.

Fred Blassie transcended the wrestling industry. Regardless of whether he's remembered as a vampire or a fashion plate, he'll never be forgotten



Tribute To A Vampire

FREDDIE BLASSIE

1918-2003

By Dan Murphy

"I WAS BORN mean and I stayed mean all my life."

Fred Blassie spoke these words at the age of 82 upon receiving the 2000 Editors' Award from the staff of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*. For Blassie, that statement wasn't just a playful self-deprecating jibe, it was a summary of his career and his life between the ropes. It was a fitting mission statement for a wrestler many considered the greatest rulebreaker in history.

Blassie died on June 2, 2003, after suffering from heart and kidney troubles.

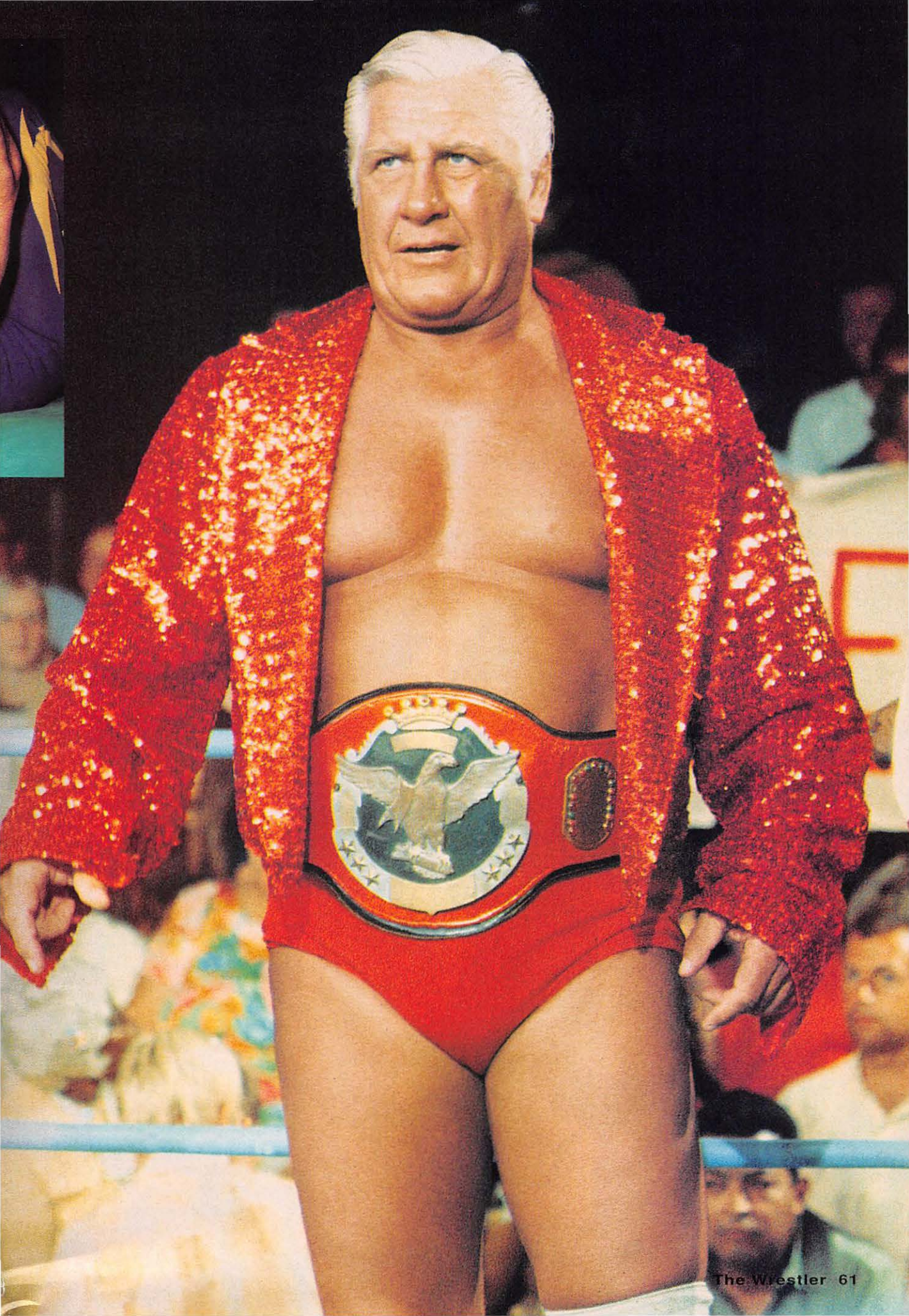
Freddie Kenneth Blassie was born on February 8, 1918, in St. Louis, Missouri—most will tell you that he was born for wrestling. He fell in love with the sport as a young boy, and wrestled his very first match with a touring carnival at the age of 17. Blassie was badly beaten in that first match and received \$1 for his efforts.

"It cost me five bucks to get a wrestler's license, so I was out four my first day on the job," Blassie said in 2000.

He started wrestling on the carnival circuit, where he coined his classic insult, "pencil-necked geek." Blassie later explained the term originally was used to describe a freak show attraction, a man with a "stack of dimes" for a neck who bit the heads of live chickens. This was the original pencil-necked geek. Blassie would use the phrase for the rest of his career.

During World War II, Blassie joined the Navy and continued to wrestle part-time as "Sailor" Fred Blassie until he was discharged in 1946.

In 1950, Blassie earned his first NWA World title match, but lost to Lou Thesz in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1952, Blassie wres-





Why, one might ask, was Blassie wearing the headgear when he's the one that had the appetite for human flesh? The Great Goliath would not win the Americas title on this occasion.

tled as "Freddie McDaniels," teaming with his "brother" Billy McDaniels in the Los Angeles territory. But Blassie's career would take off in 1953 when he went back to singles wrestling.

In 1954, he won the NWA Southern heavyweight championship, a title he would go on to win 14 times between 1954 and 1960. During this time, he bleached his hair blond, adopted the moniker "The King Of Men," and left a trail of bloody bodies in his wake. Blassie caught the attention of Los Angeles promoter Jules Strongbow

Nobody inflicted more damage on Blassie than John Tolos. Dr. Bernhart Schwartz examines Blassie after a horrific clash with "The Golden Greek" (below) and later after the Monsel's powder incident (bottom right). They would settle matters in a "Blassie cage" (right).



and was invited to Strongbow's World Wrestling Association in 1960.

In the WWA, Blassie collected wins over some of the biggest babyfaces in wrestling, including Thesz, Giant Baba, and Antonino Rocca. He won the WWA title five times, defeating legends such as Rikidozan, The Destroyer, and Edoard Carpentier for the belt. Blassie also twice held the WWA tag titles (with Mr. Moto in 1964 and Buddy Austin in 1967), as well as the Georgia title, the "Beat The Champ" TV title, and the NWA Americas Brass Knuckles title.

Due to his penchant for tearing his opponents' foreheads open with his teeth (which he claimed he filed into razor sharp fangs for that exact purpose), Blassie earned the nickname "The Vampire." He helped popularize the steel cage match and became so associated

with those bouts that cage matches became known as "Blassie cage" matches.

Perhaps the biggest feud of Blassie's career was against "The Golden Greek" John Tolos, with the coveted Americas championship at stake. In 1971, Tolos blinded Blassie with Monsel's powder and nearly ended "The Vampire's" career. The grudge match between the two was moved out of the confines of the Olympic Auditorium to the massive Los Angeles Coliseum. The bout, held on August 27, 1971, drew more than 25,000 fans, setting a state attendance record.

Despite being a hated rulebreaker, Blassie became a breakthrough star, appearing on the popular *Dick Van Dyke Show* and *The Tonight Show*.

Blassie also became a sensation in Japan, disgusting the fans with his uncontrollable bloodlust. According to legend, during his matches with the legendary Rikidozan, several fans dropped dead from heart attacks at the sight of the carnage in the ring. Much like The Sheik, when the Japanese fans saw Blassie walking to the ring, they ran out of the way in terror.

Blassie also had several chances at WWWF champions Bruno Sammartino in the 1960s and Pedro Morales in the '70s, and while he came up short, he did establish a solid relationship first with Vince McMahon Sr. and then his son. When chronic knee injuries forced him to retire, the McMahons gave him an opportunity to establish himself as a manager

"The Hollywood Fashion Plate" truly

BLASSIE & Those Other People

Freddie Blassie wasn't a superstar to wrestling fans only; he was a superstar to the stars. They all recognized his brilliance and wanted to be around him. Clockwise from top left: Joey Bishop and his sidekick, Regis Philbin ... Alan "The Skipper" Hale ... Jack Lemmon ... Fred MacMurray ... Michael Landon ... and Muhammad Ali.

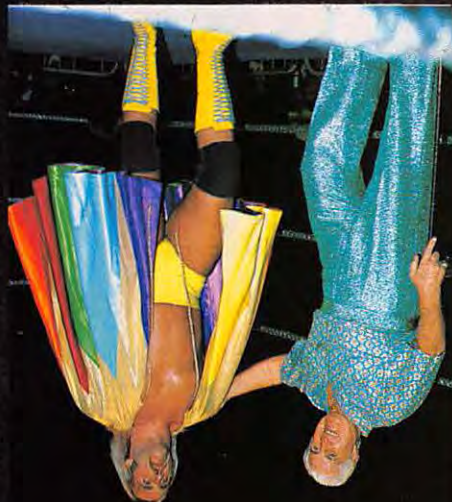


excellent in that role, managing such stars as Spiros Arion, Killer Khan, Mr. Saito, Victor Rivera, Peter Malvia, Mr. Fuji, Nikolai Volkoff, The Iron Sheik, Stan Hansen, Jesse Ventura, George Steele, and Dick Murdoch, as well as a young Hulk Hogan. He recorded the song "Pen-cil Neck Geek" and appeared in the arthouse film *Breakfast With Blassie* with comedian Andy Kaufman. He retired from managing in 1986, and was elected into the WWE Hall of Fame in 1994.

In recent years, Blassie continued to appear on WWE TV, including giving a rousing speech to the WWF team as they rallied against the WCW/ECW invasion in 2001. His autobiography, *Listen, You Pencil Neck Geeks* was released just weeks before his death, and he appeared on WWE TV for the final time in May 2003.

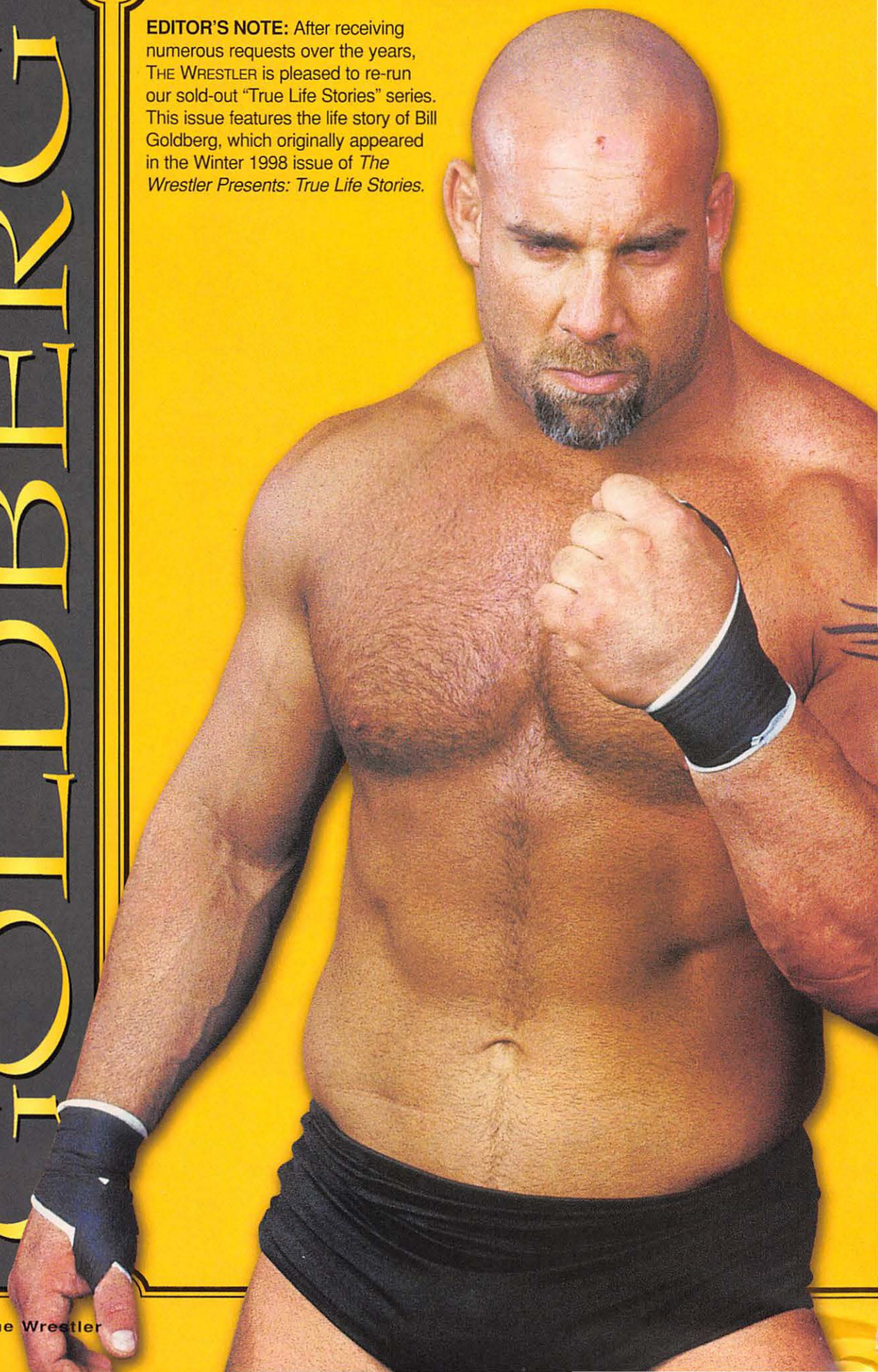
In his later years, Blassie volunteered with the Community Mayors of New York, an organization that benefits handicapped children. Seeing the kids enjoying themselves gave Blassie true joy and happiness. Maybe he didn't stay mean his whole life after all. □

Despite his blood-lust, Blassie liked to have a good time. Matchmaker Mike LeBell probably never knew he was so funny (below left). Mrs. Blassie, Miyako, could cheer Fred up under the worst of conditions (below middle). Nothing made Freddie Blassie happier, though, than comforting those less fortunate than himself (below right).



GOLDBERG

EDITOR'S NOTE: After receiving numerous requests over the years, THE WRESTLER is pleased to re-run our sold-out "True Life Stories" series. This issue features the life story of Bill Goldberg, which originally appeared in the Winter 1998 issue of *The Wrestler Presents: True Life Stories*.



FOR GOLDBERG, THE WRESTLING RING WAS HIS TRUE FIELD OF DREAMS

By Bryan Ethier

"PAGER," MUTTERED the voice at the other end of the telephone line. "May I help you?"

It was a man's voice, dripping with a deep Southern twang that made "pager" sound like "pi-a-ger."

"Uh, I'd like to leave a message," the reporter responded, confused by the sound of a live human voice on a long distance telephone paging system. Usually all you got was the robotic drone of a tape-recorded message ("Dial one to leave a numeric message; dial two for other services"). "Yeah, I want to have Bill Goldberg call me."

"Goldberg ... Goldberg," repeated the attendant, as if the name held some personal significance. "Bill Goldberg. Okay. Your message, sir?"

"I'm with *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*—actually its sister magazine THE WRESTLER."

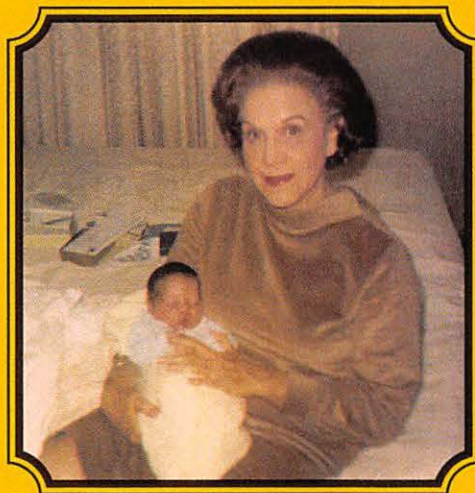
"I thought that was the Bill Goldberg," the man interjected, his voice rising with excitement. "From WCW? I watch *Nitro* all the time. Goldberg's great. Why are you calling him?"

"I'm writing his life story," the reporter explained.

"Oh, man! Oh, man! He better not lose to Hulk Hogan. I can't stand Hulk Hogan!" The attendant's voice was shrill now; the words

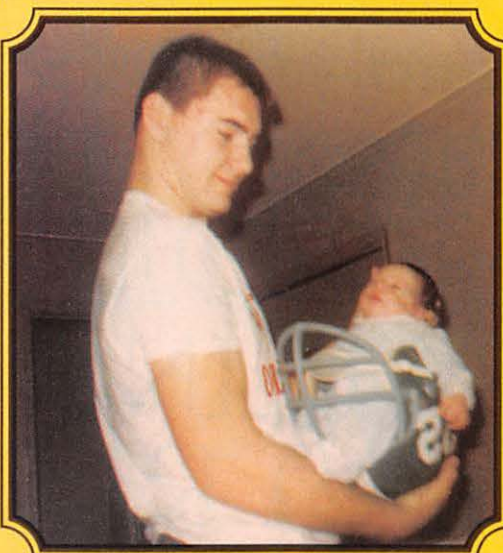


Not many fans have seen this expression on my face

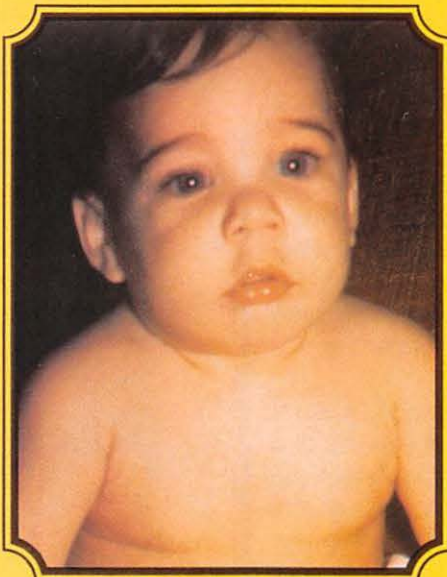


Aunt Edith holds her newborn nephew

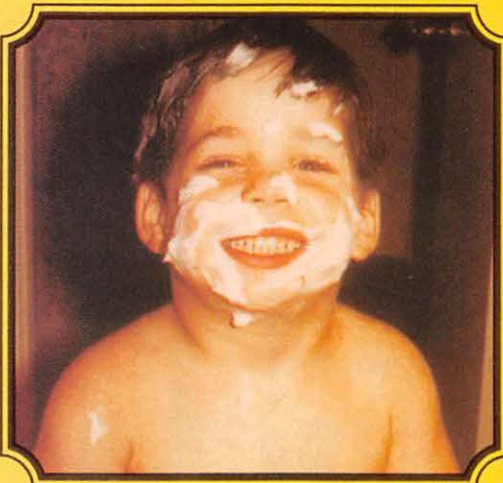
GOLDBERG



I wonder what brother Mike envisioned his baby brother doing a few years down the line



At seven months, I'm starting to take a serious look at what's going on around me



Face full of suds

were staccato, as excitement eclipsed professional decorum.

"Don't worry—Goldberg's going to be around for a while," the reporter answered.

"Oh, man! Oh, man! You're so lucky. Go get that Hogan! Go get that Hogan!"

"Don't get upset, my man," comforted the reporter. "Hey, if you want to know more about Goldberg, why don't you pick up one of our magazines?"

"I'm in Jackson, Mississippi. It's hard to find it, but I get *PWL* as much as I can."

"Well, do this: Go to a big supermarket—to the magazine section. You'll find everything you want to know about wrestling. And Goldberg. And don't worry about Hogan ... Goldberg's the hottest guy in town."

"Oh, man, I hope so. I can't stand that Hogan."

Exasperated, awestruck, stammering, and discombobulated, Jackson, Mississippi's telephone paging attendant somehow forwarded the message to Goldberg, for a half-hour later, the reporter's telephone rang.

This time the voice on the end of the line was controlled, deep, and throaty—a grizzly bear of a voice. Quickly the reporter recounted the incident of the excitable paging attendant from Mississippi. Even in the most remote corners of America, Goldberg was driving wrestling fans into a frenzy.

"That's funny—unbelievable," laughed Goldberg. "It's amazing. I never would have called it. I always felt confident I could do something positive, but I never would have imagined I would have risen to those heights I have in such a short time."

Goldberg's meteoric rise has left nemesis Hogan wondering and the fans screaming for more. In a matter of months, Goldberg rose from promising muscleman to WCW U.S. champion to WCW World champion.

His secret to success? Hard work, dedication, and persistence.

"I refuse to be mediocre at anything I do, so hopefully my hard work is what got me to the top and is going

to keep me at the top," he says.

It is a simple design for success ... too common a formula, actually, one employed by ditch diggers to physicians to soda jerks. True, Goldberg's training habits are impeccable; sure, his physique resembles a mountain trimmed by a flick of God's finger. But these are the attributes of, oh, 90 percent of the top pros on the wrestling circuit. So what sets Goldberg apart from his colleagues? Consider his attitude toward himself and winning.

"If I was 1,000-1, I still wouldn't be happy."

Then take tonight, one of the rare nights off. Goldberg is unwinding—at least in Goldbergian terms. Before him sits a stack of videotapes—copies of his recent matches. Shortly, he will put his feet up, flip on the TV and VCR, and review every chinlock applied, every full bodyslam, every nuance of his game. In 30 seconds, he will probably be convinced he has found 10 errors. He will take these miscues, learn from them, and mentally reprogram himself not to make the same mistakes again. Tomorrow is a new day, after all. There will be a new opponent, new fans to charge up, his belt to defend again.

For WCW's newest megastar, every day, every match is his first ever; every fan has a different face, different wants, different buttons to push. He *will* leave them starry-eyed ... or else. This is his personal mandate, the only way the perfectionist within him will permit him to thrive.

"If I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it right," he says. "The only way I can continue to improve is to put so much pressure on myself that I have a hell of a lot to live up to. I truly don't do it for the other people. I don't do it for success. I don't do it for the limelight. I do it to keep myself happy."

If wrestling's primary rewards are stardom, public adulation, and financial security, from where does Goldberg derive his professional, personal, and athletic happiness?



Happy birthday to me, one year old

That question is not easily answered, not even by Goldberg. For despite his professed simple convictions and ease with introspection, he is an impassioned man not always willing to delve deeply into painful emotions. He is empathic yet blind, sensitive yet brutal, flip-pant yet pained. To call him enigmatic would be extreme, for it is in his pursuit of perfection that he is most clearly defined.

Bill Goldberg is simply a dichotomy. Consider a portion of his emotional and philosophical self-analysis:

"Hardly anything bothers me."

"I like to deal with things diplomatically and not hurt people—in the meantime get my point across. I can sit here and talk calmly about just about anything, but if you ask me something that pisses me off, you'll definitely get the other side of me."

"What you see is what you get."

"I like portraying the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde side, because that's been my entire life."

William Goldberg (yes, that is his real name) was born 31 years ago, the youngest of Ethel and Jed's four children. Legend has it that a football magically appeared in his hospital bassinet just minutes after his birth. Residing in Tulsa,

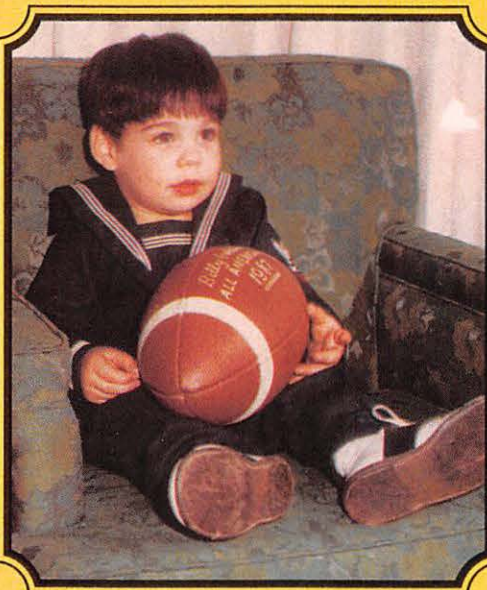


Chowin' down in my high chair



Ma, I need more than one chicken leg to eat!

GOLDBERG



Great expectations: My brothers gave me this ball in 1968 when I was two, naming me to the All-America team in 1987. I came close, being named all-SEC in '88 and '89.

Oklahoma, necessitated a devotion to high school and college football, and the Goldberg residence was usually abuzz with pigskins zipping around the yard—and through Ethel's kitchen.

For Bill not to be captivated by the excitement of football was tantamount to Neil Armstrong's children never seeing the moon. Bill's brothers, Mike and Steve, ate lunch off kicking tees rather than Mom's plates; both starred on the gridiron at Tulsa's Edison High, Mike as a defensive lineman, Steve as a linebacker and kicker. After completing all-state high school careers, they both

went on to play at the University of Minnesota. Although Bill was 12 years younger than Steve and 17 years younger than Mike, his brothers influenced him deeply. Through their feats between the hash marks, Bill Goldberg grew up with a vision in his mind's eye—that of smashing the pulp out of a fleet-footed tailback.

His dream of playing pro ball was further enlivened the day he saw Hall of Fame linebacker Dick Butkus interviewed on television.

Pro football is like the movie *Hush*, *Hush*, *Sweet Charlotte*, explained Butkus. The scene where the head goes rolling down the stairs—that's football.

That was football, as far as Bill Goldberg and his brothers were concerned. Break the other guy in half, rupture a spleen, poke out an eyeball. Football catered to the sadistic side of Goldberg, and, in eighth grade, when he donned pads and stood in the trenches for the first time, his mission was clear: to cut people in half whenever he tackled them.

The dark side of Goldberg, however, sharply contrasted the empathic, respectful young man raised by Mom and Dad. Their advice to their son: "Be yourself, set high goals, work hard to attain them, don't step on other people's toes, and treat people the way you want to be treated. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Mom and Dad provided a set of



That's Mike (holding me), along with Barbara and Steve



Aunt Edith looks on as I play with my talking animal book



Now I'm four, and again surrounded my loving siblings, Steve, Barb, and Mike

morals and ethics: Bill Goldberg's heart provided the impetus for his future. Now all that stood between him and a pro football career was ... about a dozen years, success, a college degree, a pro team to draft him ...

Goldberg easily cleared hurdle number one. Like his older brothers, he was a huge success in high school—all-city, all-state, defensive player of the year. On the field, he was a terror, doing unto others as they would have done unto him—namely making scatbacks named Emil Farquhar swallow their chin straps.

It's a dog-eat-dog world out there, he thought. You gotta do what you gotta do best, as long as it's within the rules.

The rules said nothing about playing as mean as a convict scrimmaging against the prison guards. The rules never encroached upon Butkus; they would not impose upon themselves on the will of Bill Goldberg, either.

At the conclusion of his high school career, Goldberg could have taken his hunger for crepes de les fullbacks to a variety of Division I programs. Indeed, he would have loved to have played for Barry Switzer at Oklahoma. But he decided to follow the lead of his

brothers and play out of state. It was better to make a name for yourself, he concluded, than to ride upon your high school laurels.

Goldberg's senior year in high school was the dream of every burly 235-pound football player; the turf was his battlefield: an acceptable receptacle for his aggression, a way to fill another void.

Things weren't going as well at home, however. During Bill's senior year in high school, Ethel and Jed Goldberg separated and were divorced.

I've been thrown right into the middle of this, Bill Goldberg concluded, now age 17. Unfortunately, his siblings were long out of the house.

None of this is ill-intentioned, he thought on one hand.

Conversely, I caught the brunt of the bull.

The breakup battered Goldberg's self-esteem. When Dad hung around longer than Bill's mother, Bill felt guilty.

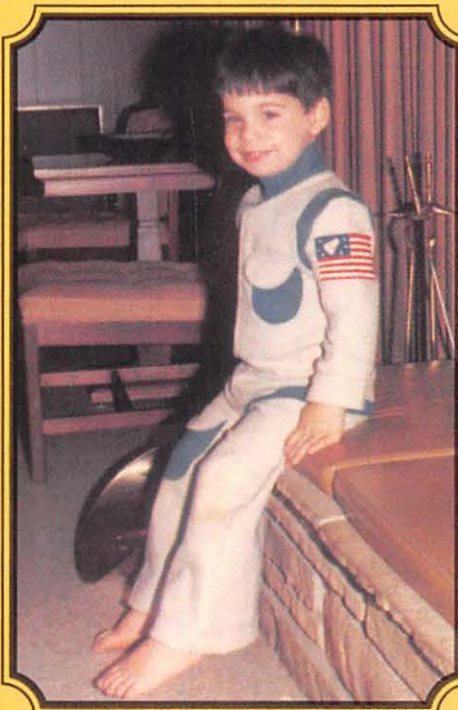
It's my fault, he concluded.

The tension in the Goldberg home fueled a fire within Bill Goldberg's soul. He was sweet Charlotte; he wanted to knock someone's head off his shoulders.

He might have done so had it

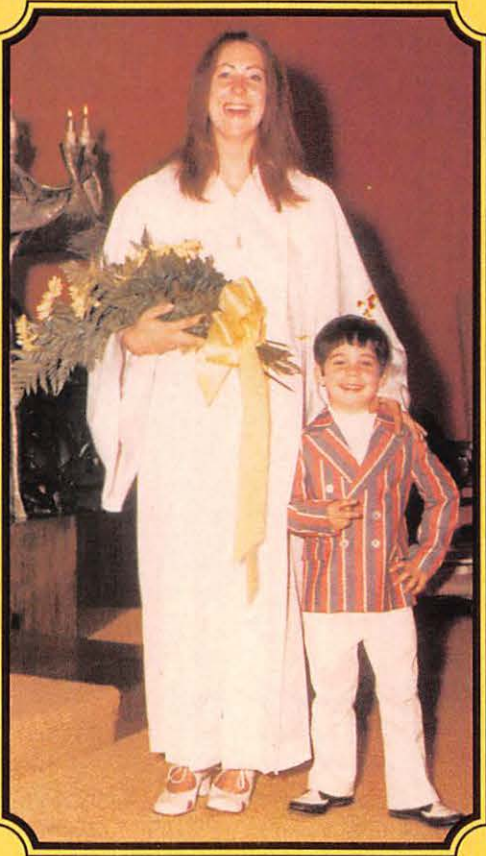
not been for the support of his older sister, Barbara. Barb was the friend he needed during this emotional storm—his sounding board. Sensing he needed a close companion, Barbara purchased a rottweiler for her little brother. Bill named the dog Rocky, and Rocky became his best friend.

Through the tumult, Bill Goldberg continued to grasp at the fam-



How could such a cute kid grow up to be such a killer?

GOLDBERG



Kathy and me at our aunt's wedding, 1974

ily maxim: Try not to hurt people. It was not always easy to do so when he was hurting inside. Some people say time is the ultimate healer; for Goldberg, however, an apt motto would be that distance is the ultimate healer. When it came time to choose a college, Gold-

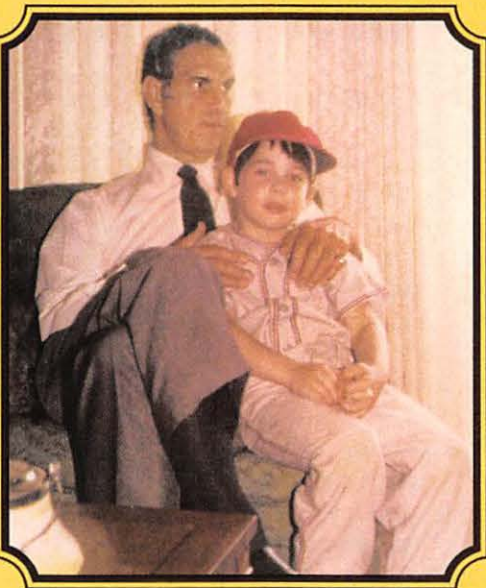
berg picked Georgia. Pigskin between the hedges, Vince Dooley, junkyard dog defense. What a marriage! UG had it all. Best yet, it offered Goldberg a modicum of anonymity. After all, how many people in Georgia had heard of a kid named Goldberg from Tulsa, Oklahoma? Oklahomans didn't come here. They went to Switzer U.

But those others weren't Bill Goldberg. Goldberg, the man with the impossibly high standards for himself, had to be not just successful, but he had to do so from scratch. Leaving home was easy, yet hard. Goldberg had grown accustomed to relying on Mom and Dad. Suddenly, they weren't there. Just Athens, the cherry red jerseys, Dooley, and a new world to conquer. The world of the *Dawgs*.

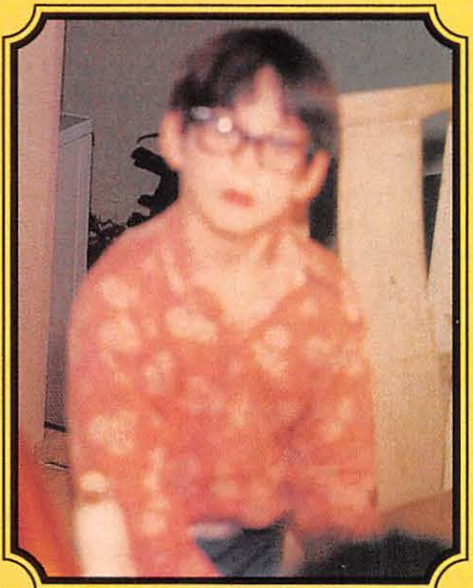
He arrived on campus clad in Raiders black and bearing the Oakland swagger and chippiness. He was the big kid from Oklahoma, and he knew he had a lot to prove, both to himself and to others. He was just champing at the bit to get out on the field.

His freshman year was a coming of age, as it is for many frosh. Goldberg learned about life on his own, about responsibility, about self-discipline. Without his sister to stand by him, he turned to upperclassmen for support. Slowly, his self-confidence began to come back.

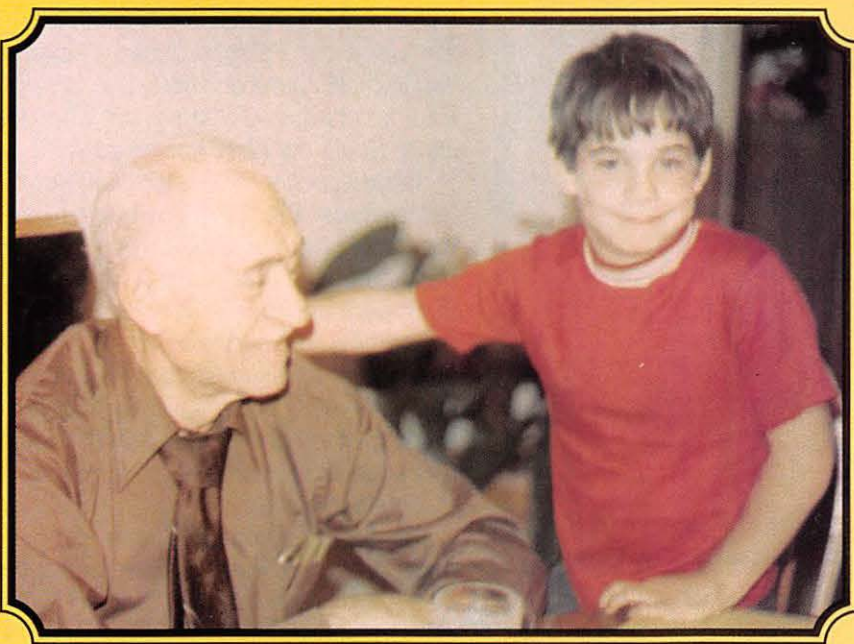
Between 1987 and 1989, Goldberg was selected to the all-SEC team, and he was later chosen to Georgia's all-



My uncle, Louis Wolfson, owns the legendary thoroughbred Affirmed



Should I let you guys print this picture? What the heck, it's out of focus anyway.



My grandfather, Marcel Kasner



*Another happy birthday for Billy
(I think I was nine)*

decade team for the 1980s. Georgia football helped Goldberg tackle the trials and tribulations of his senior year in high school. A key figure in his emotional growth was Dooley, under whom Goldberg played three of his four years.

Georgia's venerable mentor gave Goldberg a sense of discipline on the field, in the classroom, and in his mind. He was, to Goldberg, a legend, and to be able to contribute significantly to a program headed by such an esteemed man was an honor Goldberg would always wear "on my sleeve."

After four years between the hedges, Goldberg had proven to himself, his detractors, and fans that with a lot of heart and determination, anyone can do anything.

Just don't settle for anything else ...

As Goldberg soon learned, however, some things are out of a person's control.

After graduating from college, Goldberg was ranked among the 52 top college players in the nation. He anticipated being selected high in the upcoming draft, and his dream of one day playing pro ball was about to become a reality. But then he was befallen by a series of setbacks.

Just prior to the draft, he con-

tracted mononucleosis, and his weight dropped from 270 to 245. His illness precluded his participating in the NFL Combine, which affords a player the opportunity to show his wares to NFL coaches.

Goldberg's stock plummeted, and he was not picked until the 10th round by the Los Angeles Rams. The disappointingly low selection only encouraged Goldberg to try even harder to impress the Rams' coaching staff. But during the team's final preseason game, Goldberg tore a hamstring muscle and was cut.

I've made it to the NFL—that

was my dream, Goldberg told himself. But I want to be the best. I want to have a long career. That he hadn't done.

To get a step forward, Goldberg took two steps backward and signed a contract to play for the Sacramento Surge of the World Football League. He played well that year and caught the eye of the Atlanta Falcons' staff. The following fall, he was invited to their training camp.

The 270-pound blue-collar lineman didn't send any heads tumbling through the end zone, but he stuck around with Atlanta for two seasons.



Visiting Mike in Miami at eight

GOLDBERG



Talk about your odd couple!

His perseverance earned him his coaches' respect; his internal fire earned him a couple of fines for fighting during games.

There's gotta be a winner and a loser, and I like to be a winner.

During the 1994 campaign, Goldberg tore the abdominal muscle attached to his pelvic bone. By wrapping the muscle, he was able to finish out the season. Surgery was later performed to repair the

torn muscle, and based on the severity of the injury, the Falcons chose to expose him to the Expansion Draft. The Carolina Panthers drafted Goldberg, but when the injury would not heal, he retired.

What now? he asked himself. For the last decade, Bill Goldberg had enjoyed the limelight, success, prosperity. He had aimed for the stars and overshot them by a universe.

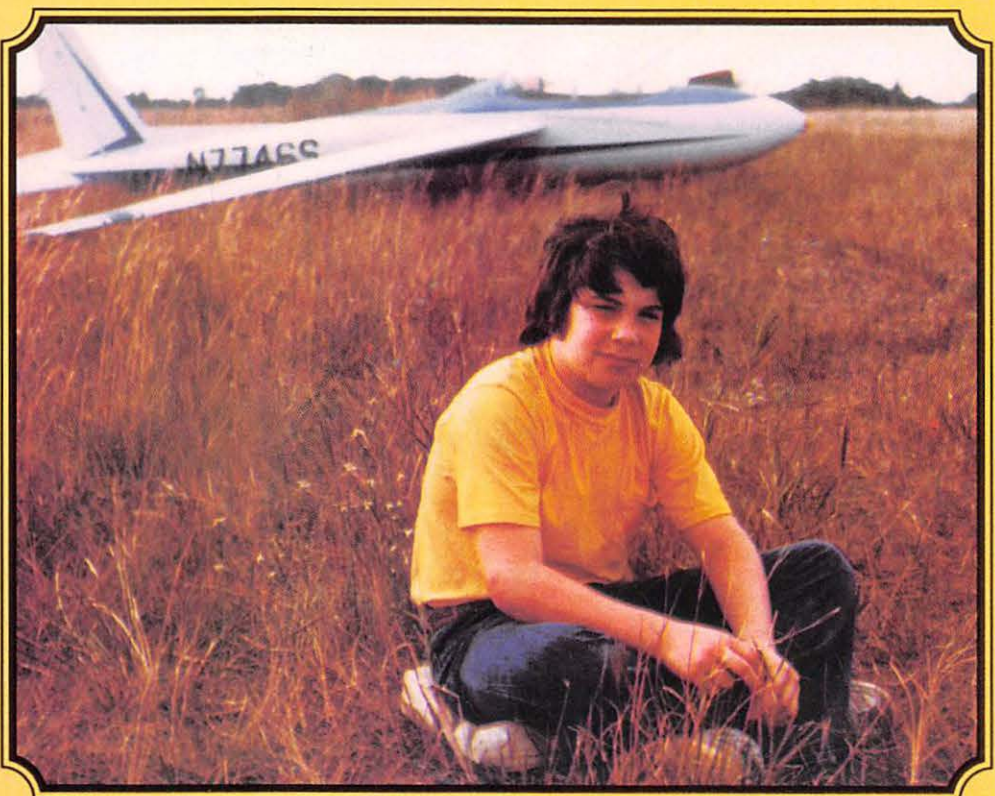
But now this perfectionist was devoid of any long-term goals. There was little to rouse him early in the morning, to get him to the gym to bench-press repetition after repetition like Charles Atlas gone mad.

This is horrible.

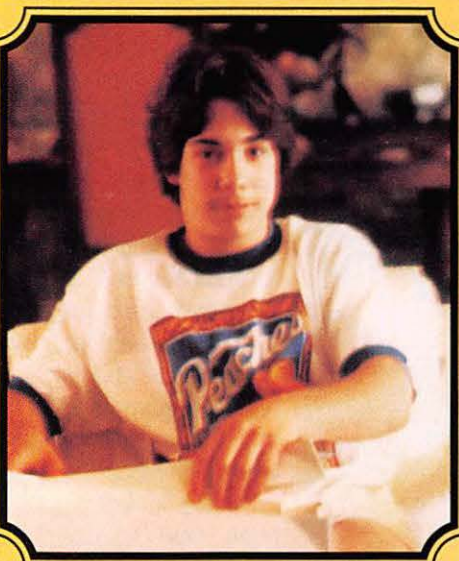
Goldberg considered going into business as a personal trainer and pondered working with his brother in the cargo plane industry. Neither job made him burn inside, for having shot for the end zone since he was old enough to drool on a pigskin, these other occupations were emotional desk jobs, complete with spiritual paper weights.

Goldberg may not have sought the spotlight and the cheers, but those perks were endemic to his career in athletics.

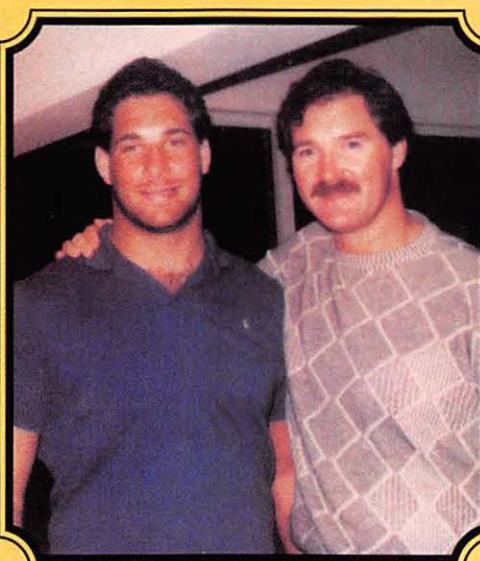
I miss the locker room. I miss the guys. I miss the fun.



I went gliding with my brother Mike in Miami when I was 12



It's hard to tell; I guess I was about 14 here



I'm finally the same height as my older brother Mike

Fun—that was the operative word. There was no way anyone was going to get him to do something he didn't enjoy. Goldberg knew he was good in front of a crowd. How could he not be, since he was known as "The Mouth Of The South"? He was also glib, able to ham it up with anyone, a salesman in a jockstrap.

Why not put my athleticism with my ability to perform in front of the camera?

During his two seasons in Atlanta, Goldberg had befriended a number of WCW wrestlers, including "Diamond" Dallas Page, the Steiners, Marcus Bagwell, Lex Luger, and Sting. Goldberg noted that whenever this gang of grapplers was together,

they always had fun, always seemed to enjoy each other's company. Goldberg, a wrestling fan as a kid, thought his "controlled fanaticism" would suit him well on the mat. Page agreed, and he arranged a meeting between Goldberg and Eric Bischoff.

Goldberg signed a contract with WCW in September 1996. He trained for four months, overcame a minor injury, then participated in his first matches in February 1997. In September of that same year, he

earned his first exposure on *WCW Monday Nitro*.

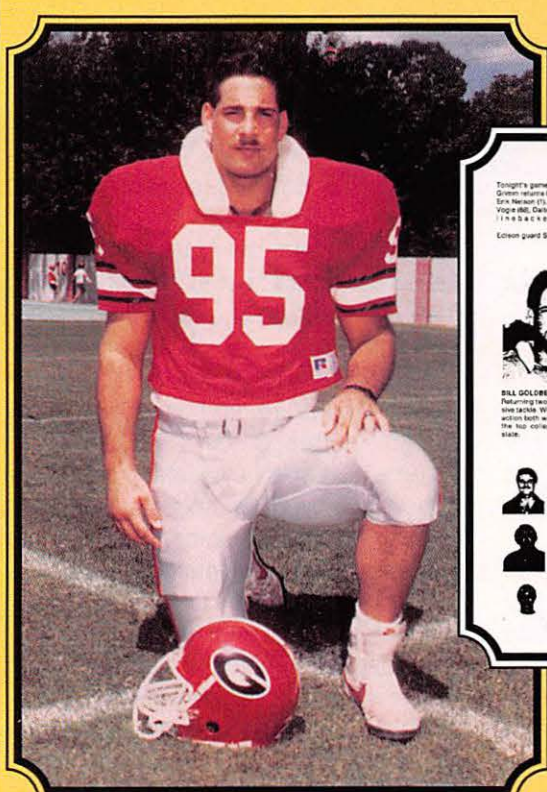
The rest belongs in the stars.

There is a sense of synchronicity here, as if Goldberg, Bischoff, the fans—*fate*—all seem to be intertwined. He and Bischoff share a mutual respect, and the two have communicated honestly and directly from the outset of their business relationship.

"I told him at the beginning, 'I'm not going to be some [jerk] thrown around the ring for 500 bucks,'" Goldberg recalled. "Because I'm going to come in, and I'm going to do it right, and I'm going to shoot the [bull] with you straight."

His reward for hard work and honesty was a shot at a title, which he turned into a decisive win. Success on the mat is that ever-present dichotomy for Goldberg. A part of him bristles at the possibility of being too successful too quickly; he is, after all, the Oklahoman who traveled 1,000 miles to prove he could play college ball in a town that generally sneers at gridders from Switzer-land.

"I'm embarrassed in a way, because I've only been here a short period of time," he says, "and there's so many people who just worked their [butt] off for years in this sport, and they don't get the credit they deserve. Here I come in, and I get the



A sophomore for the University of Georgia

EDISON VS. CASCIA HALL

Tonight's game will feature the first meeting ever between the Eagles and Commanders. Coach Frank Given returns 8 starters from his 5-4 1993 squad. His offense will be built around the arm of quarterback Tim Heaton (7), the eagerly outstanding running back Brent Capshaw. Other players to watch are Taddy Voge (86), Dalton Young (73), Juan Perez (30), David Robinson (87) in the line and Mike Vandervort (40) at linebacker.

Edison guard Scott Childers will miss tonight's game after knee surgery. No other injuries are reported.



BILL GOLDBERG
Returning two year starter at defensive tackle. Will probably see some action both ways this year. One of the top college prospects in the state.

TONIGHT'S CAPTAINS



BARRY LEWIS
One of nine (9) returning defensive starters. Has added size and speed and is looking forward to an outstanding year. Will also share time at fullback.

NEW COACHES

The staff has added three new assistant coaches this year. They are:



ED MCCAIN
Ed comes to Edison from Mansfield High School where his basketball team won the 1994 State Championship. He will be the Resident Coach and Head Basketball Coach. He is married to Paula and is a 1979 graduate of Southeastern State in Durant.



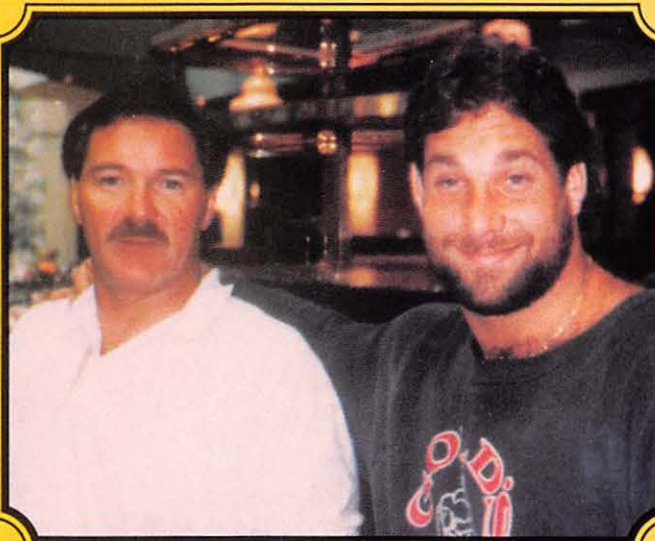
DON RANDOLPH
Don comes to Edison from Bartlesville Senior High where he was an outstanding Defensive Coach. He will coach the defensive line. He is a 1969 graduate of Northeastern State in Tahlequah and his wife, Linda, is a teacher in the Bartlesville School System.



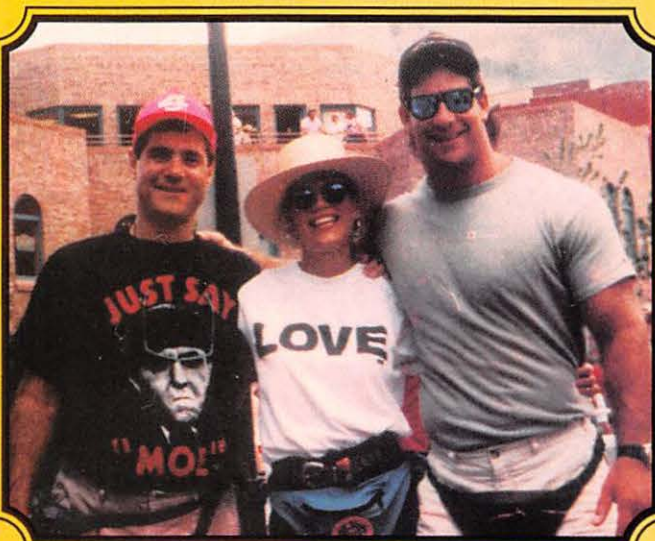
THOMAS FAGG
Tom comes to Edison from Bartlesville where he was an Assistant Football Coach and Head Wrestling Coach. He will have those same responsibilities at Edison. He is a 1979 graduate of Northeastern State and his wife is Peggy.

This was a program sheet for our high school game against Cascia Hall

GOLDBERG



Mike and me



Hangin' with brother Mike and his wife, Georgia

big push, and there's some resentment ..."

Then again ... "If I've given anything, it feels like too much. That's why I like this wrestling deal, because nobody knew who the hell I was and they can put you in and give you a push, but if you can't carry it, you're just like anybody else. And I am not like anybody else."

Goldberg the wrestler is Goldberg the football player, at Edison High, at Georgia, with the Falcons. He operates in only one speed: overdrive. He prepares for a wrestling match with the same intensity and the same focus he used before lining up against a spitting, trash-talking offensive tackle from Auburn or LSU.

When the bell rings, Goldberg is con-

trolled fanaticism sometimes out of control. Anything less than 100 percent effort is unacceptable. This is personal business, he'll tell you, and that other clown across the ring is out there to steal his belt, to push him out of the spotlight.

The perfectionist will not accept the stereotypical big man style of chin-locking, suplexing, clotheslining.

"I like to bring something new to the table each and every time," he says.

Goldberg claims he does not do this to placate his fans, yet each time he arrives in town for a show, he is back in front of the VCR, scrutinizing a tape of his last match in this town. There are always flaws in the technique, errors in judgment to correct. Once again, the question is why? Why give 120 percent to every endeavor, every day of his life? Why such steep, ostensibly unfair self-standards? Why, even as WCW champ, is he not content with his success? Why wrestle not for the money or the fame

or the acceptance, but to be happy, even when his definition of happiness is so ill defined?

"You can never be the best, you can never be too good, you can never know enough," he responds.

There are times he relents, grabs a fishing pole and his dogs, and heads out to a creek to fish. For a moment, Bill Goldberg is slowing down ... at least physically. His mind—his imagination and creative well-spring—never stop working, however.

So just when that worm gets soggy in the water, he is dusting himself off, jumping back in his land cruiser. Back to the gym, to the ring, to the videotapes. *More, more, more.* As his successes multiply, his expectations increase exponentially.

So who is he, after all?

Ultimately, Bill Goldberg is the kid from Tulsa who treats people fairly, who lives by the creed of *do unto others*. He is the performer who might end his career 1,000-1 and not be satisfied.

Ultimately, Bill Goldberg is a dichotomy incarnate. He is the "good person" his parents raised—honorable, fair, sympathetic. Surprisingly pained, vulnerable, even though he will deny it. He will tell you he can recount his parents' divorce without it bothering him. Then his voice will drop an octave, a shade quieter, angry when he remembers being caught in the storm that is parental separation.

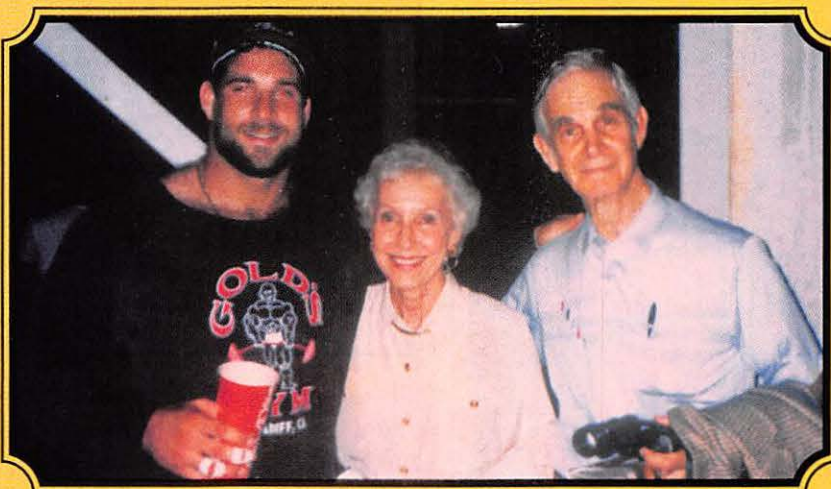
On a deeper level, he is about excusing himself for stepping on a person's toes. He is the thoughtful man who will bless a stranger for sneezing. He will pull a chair out for you, help you into it. He will humbly thank you for your good wishes.

It takes five seconds and less energy to be a good guy than to be a bad guy.

Bill Goldberg expects nothing less than decorum and manners from himself. True to his Jekyll and Hyde personality colors, he expects the same from others. "If they don't have the courtesy to do that with me," he says, "then I will bring down the wrath of God on them." □



Out to dinner with (from left to right) Mike, Steve, Mom, myself, and Barbara



A visit from the Wolfsons at the Georgia-Florida game



This photo was taken at the Wolfson Children's Hospital (named for Uncle Louis) in Jacksonville

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Is 180 pages enough for you?
Well, it better be because there isn't a bigger
wrestling magazine anywhere on this planet!

AT NEWSSTANDS SEPTEMBER 9!

(Good news, subscribers: This monster special is part of your annual subscription!)

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AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE!**

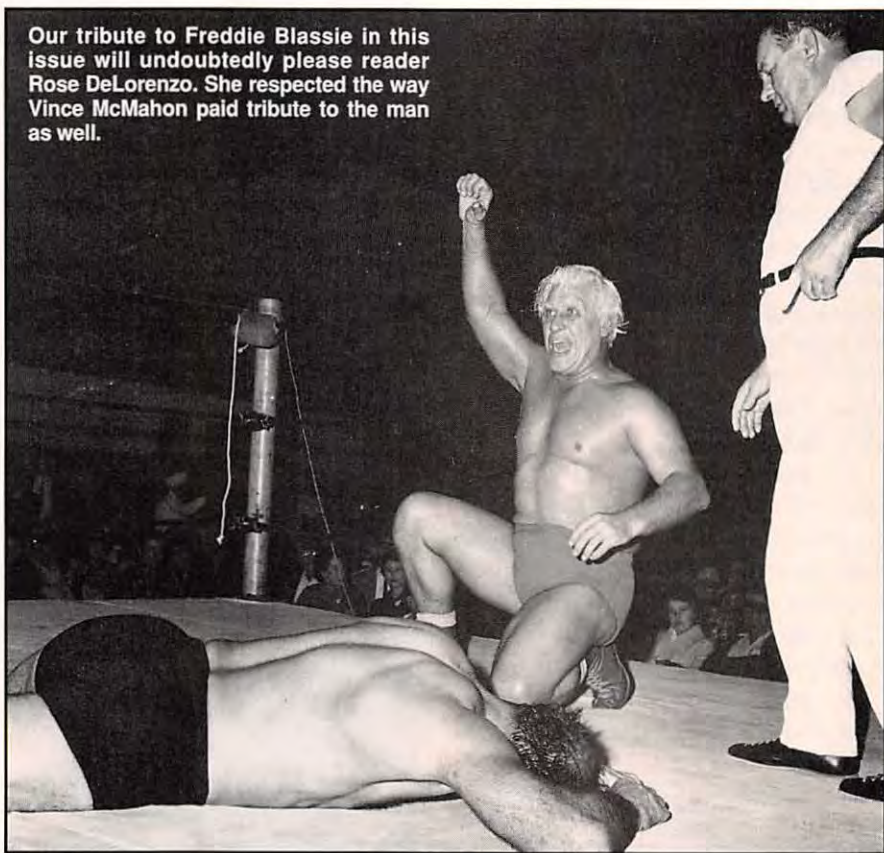
PW 500

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YOUR LETTERS

(Continued from page 5)

Our tribute to Freddie Blassie in this issue will undoubtedly please reader Rose DeLorenzo. She respected the way Vince McMahon paid tribute to the man as well.



ture grapplers of yesteryear more often, because their stories are so intriguing. Indeed, you shouldn't limit your coverage to just champions and current superstars.

And these stories wouldn't have to pay tribute to only former main-eventers. When he was alive, Frankie Williams—the pride of Columbus, Ohio—could have discussed his encounters with the sport's big names. Or how about another journeyman, Gypsy Rodriguez, recalling his match against a newcomer named Andre the Giant?

Features on The Rock and Kurt Angle are fine, but how about some offbeat stories about the grapplers who paved the way for today's stars?

LISA ANN IOPOLO

ROBERT TRIBUZIO JR.

Bronx, NY

autobiography, *Listen, You Pencil Neck Geeks!* Blassie had received more publicity than he had in decades, appearing on the May 12 edition of *Raw* and on *Confidential*. Thank goodness he was able to tell his life story in time. I already have a copy of the book, and it makes for compelling reading.

Also, WWE did a good job of paying tribute to Blassie on its programs. While I realize Vince McMahon considered him a special employee, Blassie deserved that recognition—and I hope this will inspire McMahon to honor other fallen warriors in the future.

Freddie, you were one of a kind.
May God bless the Blassie family.

ROSE DeLORENZO
Silver Springs, MD □

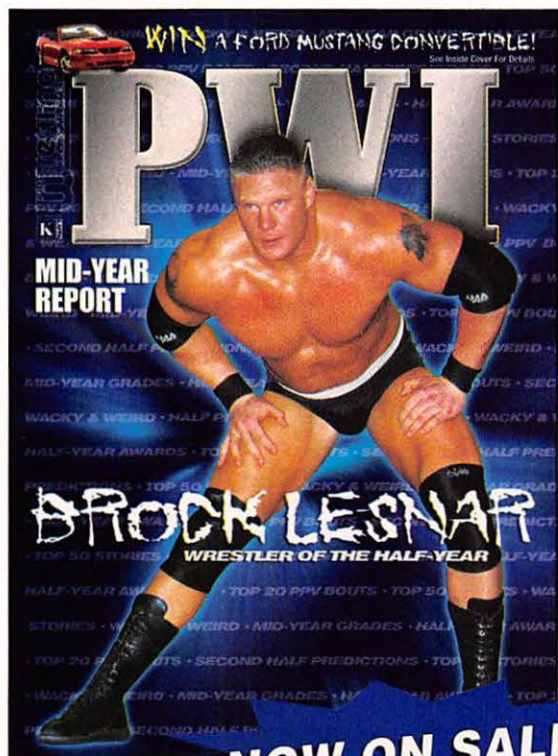
CLASSY SENDOFF

I was saddened by the loss of the legendary "Classy" Freddie Blassie because of the recent release of his

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this month in...

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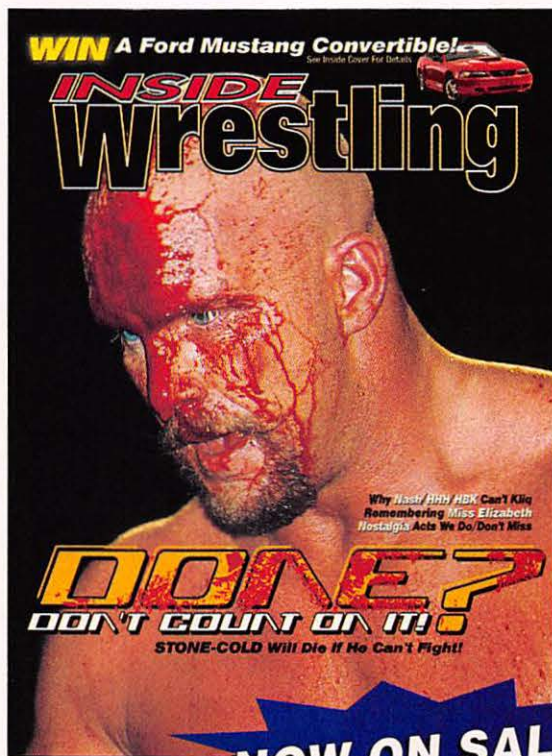


NOW ON SALE!

We've passed the midway point of 2003, and that means it's time for our comprehensive, all-encompassing Mid-Year Report! What a crazy, exciting, and, at times, sad half-year this was! Goldberg debuts in WWE, Austin returns, and then retires, again too many deaths—and those were just a few of the top 50 stories in our special "PWI 50"! In addition to that section, we have a review of the wild and wacky, the top 20 pay-per-view matches, half-year awards, top 10 *Raw* and *Smackdown* moments, superstars' grades, second-half predictions, plus a compelling in-depth "Press Conference" with **MICK FOLEY**!

All this—and much more—in the October 2003 issue of **PWI**

INSIDE Wrestling®



NOW ON SALE!

Do you really think **STEVE AUSTIN** has wrestled his last match? He might think so, but we know better. "The Rattlesnake" will find a way to fight again for sure, even if it's only on special occasions! ... **THE KLIQ** sure doesn't click anymore, and we will try to figure out why **KEVIN NASH**, **TRIPLE-H**, and **SHAWN MICHAELS** can't get along. It might just have something to do with a certain, *um*, "Bad Guy" ... With **VINCE MCMAHON** on a bit of a nostalgia kick, we have some advice for him: We'll list the five stars he *should* bring back—and five he *should* leave buried in parts unknown!

All this—and much more—in the October 2003 issue of **Inside Wrestling**

WHAT'S HAPPENING

(Continued from page 7)



Would anyone blame Batista if the rumors are true and he really did get a little choked up upon finding out that Triple-H was looking to replace him in Evolution?

autobiography on October 21 ... **Gail Kim** won the WWE women's title on June 30 in her TV debut. That's what you call making an impact. I look forward to her series of matches with **Victoria**.

In another sign of how far the mighty have fallen, **The Road Warriors** lost the IPW tag team title to **The Shane Twins** (briefly known as TNA's **Richard** and **Rod Johnson**) on June 29 at the Hokkaido Sports Center in Japan. When **The Legion**

of Doom is losing matches to the likes of the Shanes, it might be time to wash off the face paint.

The man who threw down the NWA title in disgust after winning it in a tournament in 1994 is now competing in NWA-TNA. **Shane Douglas** apparently has issues to settle with former ECW rival **Raven** in what could become one of the most explosive feuds in TNA's brief history.

"What I really want to do is destroy Raven once and for all and then maybe slap **A.J. Styles** around," Douglas said. "Then, just to prove the point that 'The Franchise' is bigger than any title belt, I'll throw that old school NWA belt into a trash compactor. That's where it belongs."

In outside-the-ring TNA news, the company has opened a new office in Manhattan and has hired **Frank Romano** as its new chief operating

officer. Romano formerly served as vice president of event programming and operations for In Demand Cable. "Frank has been a supporter of TNA since its debut in June 2002, and we're thrilled to have him on board," **Jeff Jarrett** said in a news release.

The hiring gives TNA more contacts in the cable industry and could be a big help in helping the promotion grow.

Ian Decay won the Rochester Pro Wrestling title by pinning **Kevin Dunn**

in a bloody contest on June 29. Decay has virtually cornered the market on titles in upstate New York, holding championships in Rochester and Buffalo. And congratulations to Dunn and **Mean Marcos** on their first Ring of Honor win, over **Prince Nana** and **Jimmy Jact Cash** on June 28. I've been following the careers of both guys for several years, and I'm glad to see them making their mark in ROH.

Finally, former WWF and WCW promoter **Zane Bresloff**, 57, died on June 20 from injuries he suffered in an automobile accident. Bresloff was one of the most influential promoters during several of wrestling's boom periods from the mid-1980s through 2001. "Zane Bresloff was quite simply the most important and influential person in the wrestling business you never heard of," NWA-TNA commentator **Mike Tenay** wrote in his Internet column. "His support helped me move up the ladder in WCW."

That's what's happening. Catch ya again next issue. □

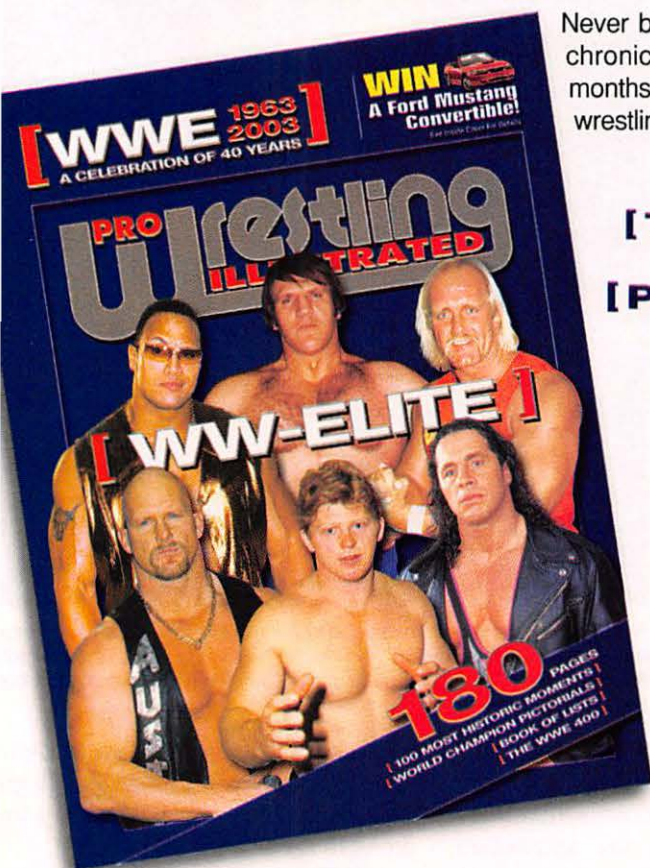


Shane Douglas apparently never settled his differences with Raven when they were in ECW. He's looking to start a new chapter of their war. And he's still trashing the NWA title, too.



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NO HOLDS BARRED

(Continued from page 10)

matches just so I could watch them a few more times.

Sure, wrestling has had an awful lot of "Holy bleep!" moments in recent years, but watching Gowen compete with some of the best wrestlers in the world is something that most wrestling fans will go out of their way to see. And once they see him perform, I'm willing to bet that a large number of them will want to see him wrestle a second time, and maybe even a third, fourth, and fifth.

If I didn't know any better, I'd say he has a little Rob Van Dam in him.

However, in Gowen, Vince also sees something more important than increased ticket sales—he sees free publicity. He sees stories in mainstream media outlets such as *USA Today* (which has already happened), *Time*, and *Newsweek*. He sees features on the nightly news programs of ABC, CBS, and NBC, and even lengthier stories on programs such as *The Today Show*, *20/20*, and *Dateline NBC*.

McMahon sees WWE being hailed as the home of the biggest underdog in the history of any sport, past, present, and future—and he sees WWE being praised for taking that chance.

Despite all my praise for Gowen earlier in this column, I'm here to tell you that it won't work—at least not in the long run.

Gowen is a very capable wrestler. The things he's able to do inside a wrestling ring astound and amaze, and I'm sure that he'd still be a better wrestler than me even if I dropped my weight down to 155 and worked out eight hours a

day, seven days a week. I also don't doubt that WWE will garner huge amounts of positive mainstream coverage thanks to its new acquisition. Gowen's story is amazing, and the Katie Couric of the world will want to listen to it until Gowen has repeated it dozens of times.

Unfortunately, this all has the chance to be a moot point, because Gowen may be good, but he isn't good enough to be in WWE. He can't stand in the ring and trade chops with Chris Benoit. He can't go to the outside and brawl with The Undertaker. He can't evade a quick-moving wrestler like Rey Mysterio Jr. when he's zipping around the ring at full speed.

Basically, he can't compete at WWE's level, and he has acknowledged publicly that he wouldn't have gotten this opportunity had he still had two legs. Unless he's been holding



Having Hulk Hogan endorse Gowen from the get-go was a smart move by WWE. And the kid has shown he can do some unbelievable things in the ring. Will Welsh cautions that having him look too good against WWE stars could be a very bad idea.

something back in the few appearances he's made on a national stage, he's good for a few ridiculously impressive spots and that's about it.

WWE officials will try to convince us otherwise. They'll tell us that he's just as good as any of the other wrestlers on the roster, and then they'll prove it by putting him in matches that he has no business winning, but somehow miraculously does—and at the expense of more talented, experienced wrestlers. That's when the scenario will start to come down, because once Gowen starts getting key wins, it'll quickly become apparent that something isn't right, that something's askew.

Suddenly, Benoit won't look as sharp, The Undertaker won't look as tough, and Mysterio and Van Dam won't look so special—and Vince McMahon will realize that WWE looks pretty darn vulnerable. □

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BLINDSIDED

(Continued from page 12)

to assist Piper from engaging in any self-destructive behavior, the WWE is ending any further discussion with Piper regarding a contract.

"The WWE sincerely hopes for Piper and his family that Roddy can find happiness."

It seems odd that a corporate giant like WWE would take such a childish stance. Piper's comments about his own drug use were taken out of context, considering that the full scope of the program dealt with WWE's alleged unwillingness to reform the industry. If WWE wasn't willing to address why Piper's comments were inaccurate or inappropriate, it shouldn't have released a statement at all. And the final two paragraphs of that statement implied that Piper was fighting inner demons in his personal life, and didn't respond to his assertion that the industry was responsible for the deaths of so many stars.

At the same time, Piper is being hypocritical, although his heart might be in the right place. In his autobiography, Piper discussed what he called "the sickness," which described wrestlers' self-perpetuating need for drugs, money, and fame. Piper also criticized the tawdry nature of WWE's current product during his book tour, stating that he would never work for Vince McMahon again because he was a father who didn't want to shame himself in front of his kids. Yet Piper returned to the company at seemingly the first opportunity. It was only when Piper became dissatisfied with the direction of his character that he started bashing the industry again.

Which is the worst offense? Is it that Piper takes money from WWE and still complains about it? Or is that so many wrestlers are taking money from WWE, even though they know something is wrong, and remain silent about it?

Of course, there's a third option here. Maybe WWE is not responsible for the deaths of these stars. At best, one could make the case that WWE was at least partially responsible for the death of Owen Hart, in the sense that its working conditions were unsafe. Yet even that death was a freak accident, and not something that was symptomatic of a larger problem. Curt Hennig and Elizabeth, the two major stars to die prematurely this year, had appeared in WCW for most of the past decade, not in WWE. Similarly, Davey Boy Smith and Rick Rude died while they were hoping to make WWE comebacks—and not active members of the roster. Brian Pillman was on the roster at the time of his 1997 death, but there's little doubt that his problems began long before he joined the company.

To their credit, WWE officials have taken an active role in trying to make sure that wrestlers with substance abuse issues receive appropriate treatment. William Regal and Eddie Guerrero both credit WWE with helping them conquer drug and alcohol problems.

No, I'm not an apologist for WWE. I wish the company



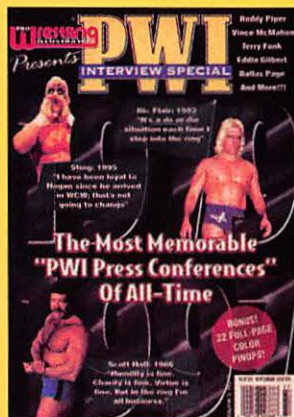
Piper wanted to make sure everyone remembered wrestling's fallen warriors when he went on tour to promote his autobiography earlier this year. But he was called a hypocrite by many when he returned to WWE after expending so much energy ripping it. His story has become a sad one.

was even more vigilant about detecting these problems and, frankly, I'm not very comfortable with a chairman who lashes out so forcefully when anyone suggests he should do anything about it. Then again, I bet McMahon is concerned about it, but because of his macho ego, wasn't about to admit it to the *Real Sports* people. And Piper is right about the sickness, too. Maybe he should feel happy that he's going back to his wife and kids.

You might wonder why I continue to follow this diseased thing called pro wrestling. It's because I enjoy wrestling, not the side effects of drug abuse and tragedy. Slowly but surely, I think pro wrestling is emerging out of the drug culture that plagued all of entertainment from the 1960s through the 1980s. I also see many responsible superstars who never get into legal trouble and who do not use illegal drugs. There are plenty of role models for clean living, if you bother to look. □

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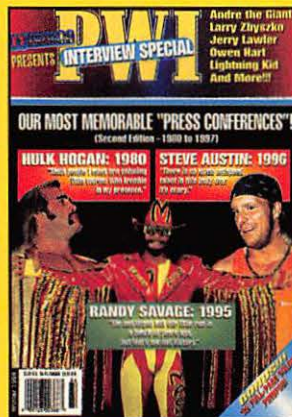
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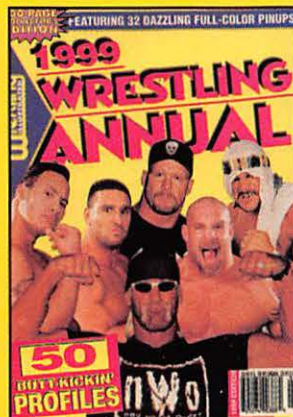
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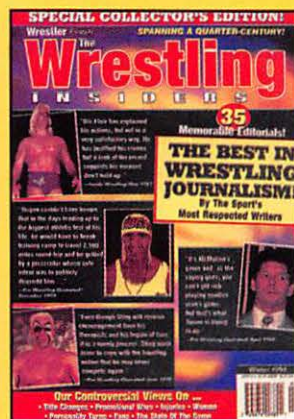
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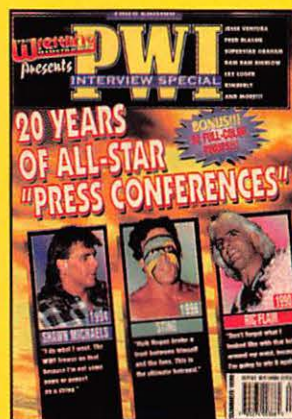
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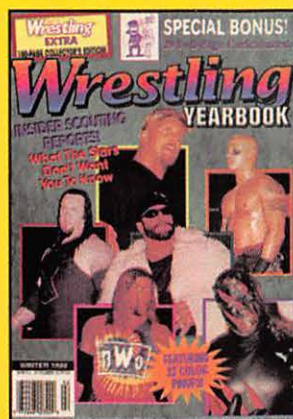
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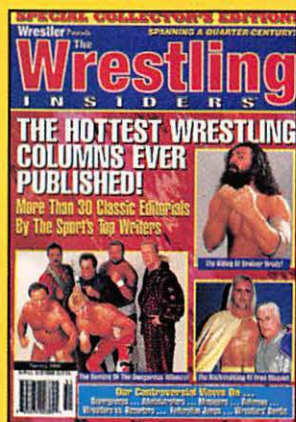
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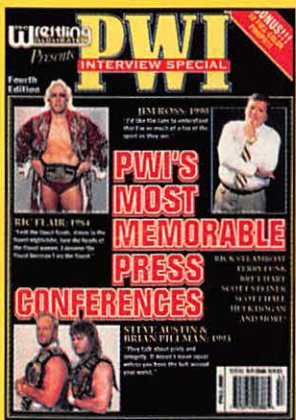


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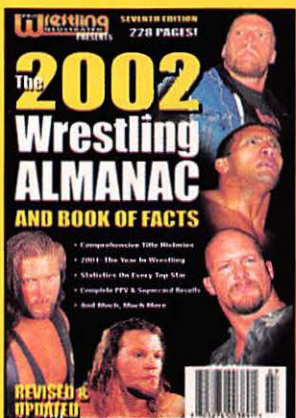
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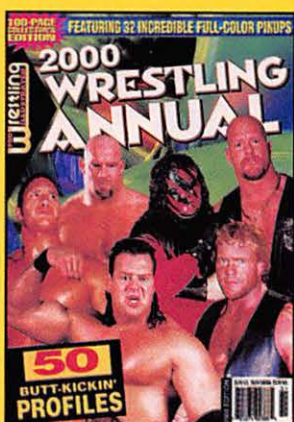
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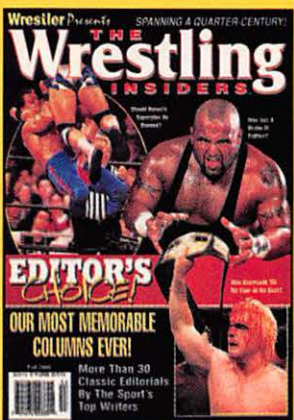
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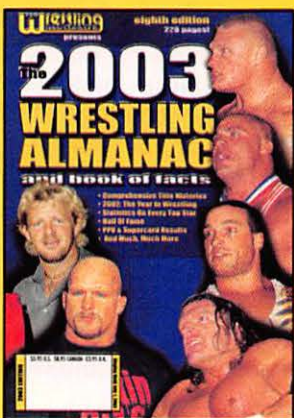
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(Continued from page 16)

Benjamin. Rhyno twisted Benjamin's arm and tagged in Benoit. "The Rabid Wolverine" quickly turned the arm-twist into a standing armlock. Benjamin finally muscled Benoit into the corner and tagged Haas, who soon fell prey to Benoit's snap suplex.

Haas neutralized Benoit with a hammerlock for some time, but Benoit finally tagged Rhyno, who took over Haas with a belly-to-belly suplex. Rhyno then tagged Benoit, who floored Haas with a shoulderblock and again with a hiptoss. Benoit then armdragged both Haas and Benjamin. Finally, Benoit and Rhyno sent the champions flying with double back-bodydrops.

Benjamin and Haas attempted to get counted out on purpose, but the referee threatened to take away their title if they did. Benoit engaged both Benjamin and Haas in solid mat grappling for the latter part of the bout, allowing Rhyno to clean up with a high-impact offense. After Rhyno unleashed a spinebuster on Haas, Benoit sent Haas backward with a German suplex, and then applied the crossface against Benjamin. Benoit eventually climbed to the top turnbuckle and smashed Benjamin with a flying headbutt. Unfortunately, Haas then hit the legal man, Rhyno, with his tag title belt, leading to the pinfall. Eddie Guerrero tried to attack Benoit after the match, but Tajiri chased him out of the ring.

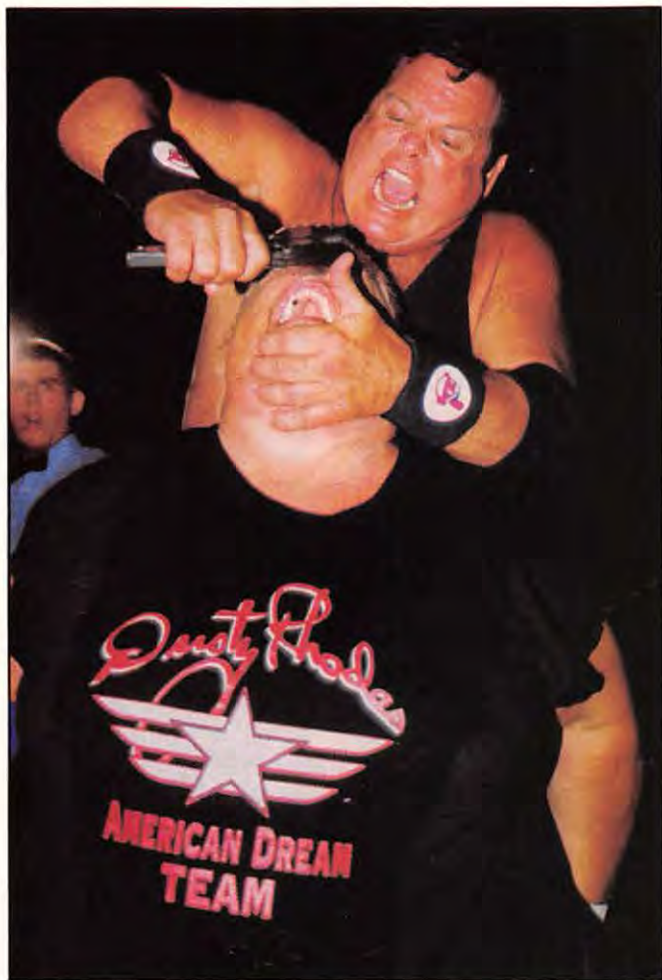
In other bouts: Bradshaw & Faarooq defeated Chuck Palumbo & Johnny Stamboli ... Billy Gunn pinned John Cena ... A-Train beat Orlando Jordan ... Matt Hardy pinned Shannon Moore ... The Basham Brothers beat Funaki & Spanky ... Ultimo Dragon defeated Jamie Noble ... Sable defeated Nidia and Dawn Marie in a bikini challenge.

Prospect, PA: International Wrestling Cartel Correspondent: Timothy A. Walker

Raw color commentator and former AWA World champion Jerry Lawler took on former NWA World champion Dusty Rhodes in this main event, which could have just as easily occurred in 1983 instead of 2003. Lawler insulted the Pittsburgh Steelers fans at the Big Butler Fair at the outset, claiming he was glad to be in Pennsylvania ... because it was near the home of his all-time favorite football team, the Cleveland Browns.

Rhodes used his size and power to win an early test of strength, and then stomped on Lawler's fingers. Lawler surprisingly agreed to lock up again, and backed Rhodes into the corner. When the referee tried to separate them, he nailed "The American Dream" with a closed fist.

Lawler continued his aggressive rulebreaking assault, choking Rhodes over the ropes and making



Even the use of a pair of tongs couldn't earn Jerry Lawler a cheap victory over Dusty Rhodes on an IWC show in Pennsylvania. In the end, "The American Dream" was the one who got the tainted win.

use of a pair of tongs as a weapon. He then blatantly used the ropes for leverage in a pin attempt, causing an argument with the referee. The wily Rhodes spotted his opening. He tripped Lawler, and the "Dream" put his own feet on the ropes for leverage ... and the unsuspecting official made the three-count.

In other bouts: Al B. Damn defeated Carlton Kaz ... The Ballard Brothers beat Dustin Ardine & Bubba the Bulldog ... T. Rantula defeated Seth James in a table match ... Shirley Doe beat Super Hentai in a streetfight ... D-Lo Brown defeated James Keenan ... Dean Radford pinned Trevor Lowe ... The Devil's Advocates defeated Sexual Harassment for the IWC tag team title in a best-of-three-falls match ... Dennis Gregory pinned Jimmy Vegas for the IWC heavyweight belt. □

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May 1979: Paul Jones-Rick Steamboat Feud: Who Is Really To Blame? Also: Valiants, Jack Brisco, Larry Hennig, Johnson-King, Lanza-Mulligan, Chief Jay Strongbow, Snuka-Patera.

April 1980: Did Ken Patera Destroy Dusty Rhodes' Bionic Elbow? Also: Terry Funk, Kevin Von Erich, DiBiase-Backlund, Bockwinkel & Heenan, Baba-Race, Mr. Wrestling II, Youngblood & Steamboat.

Aug. 1980: The Reign Of Bloodshed Begins: Stevens & Valentine Win The NWA Tag Team Title! Also: Kerry Von Erich, Backlund & Skaaland, Nick Bockwinkel, Zbyszko-Bruno, Keim-Muraco, Samoans, Wrestling II-Idol.

June 1981: Bruno Sammartino: "I Want To Break Stan Hansen's Neck!" Also: Ted DiBiase, Garea & Martel, Mike Graham, Mongolian Stomper, Piper-Superstar, Verne Gagne, Tommy Rich.

Sept. 1980: Why Ernie Ladd Says ... "I'm Tired Of Being Your King." Also: Rick Steamboat, Mad Dog Vachon, Bugsy McGraw, Patera-Patterson, Manny Fernandez, Bob Backlund, Greg Gagne, Mike Sharpe.

Feb. 1981: Larry Zbyszko's Claim: "Tony Garea Begged Me Not To Hurt Him!" Also: The Grappler, Race-Patera, Hussein Arab, Humerdink-Rhodes, Gilberts, Mr. Wrestling II, Bravo-Bockwinkel.

Oct. 1981: Is The Funk Family At War? Why Terry Funk And Dory Funk Jr. Were Forced To Wrestle. Also: Backlund-Patterson-Mosca, Harley Race, Rhodes-Khan, Kevin Sullivan, Flair-Patera, Verne Gagne.

Jan. 1982: Rich vs. Masked Superstar: Can Tommy Rich Survive As Georgia's Last Hero? Also: Kwis, Bockwinkel-Atlas, Mascaras-Steamboat, Sullivan-Van, Bruno Sammartino.

Aug. 1982: Nick Bockwinkel: "Tommy Rich Is Too Stupid To Be Champion!" Also: Putski-Adonis, Blackjack Mulligan Jr., Roddy Piper, Rick Steamboat, Lawler-Kaufman, Mike Graham.

April 1982: How Jack Brisco Controls Ric Flair's Championship Destiny. Also: Tito Santana, Valentine-Atlas, Bob Roop, Armstrongs, John Studd, Eric Embry.

May 1982: Bob Backlund's Fourth Anniversary As WWF Champion: The All-American Boy Grows Up. Also: Koloff-Rich, Superstar Graham, David Von Erich, Putski-Morales, Dusty Rhodes.

June 1982: Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat: How The NWA Belt Strangled Wrestling's Greatest Friendship. Also: Piper-Armstrong, Hussein Arab, Bruno Sammartino, Adonis V Ventura, Butch Reed.

July 1982: Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.

Sept. 1982: Dusty Rhodes Returns To Florida: The Tragic Comeback That Should Not Have Happened. Also: Manny Fernandez, Armstrong-Piper, Blassie-Mulligan, Japan, Bockwinkel-Hogan.

Nov. 1982: Clash Of The Titans—Backlund vs. Flair: Who's Better? Also: Roddy Piper, Gagne & Brunzell, Putski & Snuka, Brian Blair.

Dec. 1982: Morales vs. Snuka: Does Pedro Deserve To Be Intercontinental Champion? Also: Bob Orton Jr., Kamala, Rich & Rhodes, Barry Windham, Ted DiBiase, JYD-Bockwinkel, Oliver Humerdink.

Jan. 1983: Ivan Putski Humiliates Cowboy Bob Orton: Can The Grand Wizard Pick Up The Pieces? Also: Barry Windham, Muraco-Sawyer-Rich, Nick Bockwinkel, Flair-Youngblood-Steamboat, Fabulous Kangaroos.

Feb. 1983: Exclusive Coverage: Nick Bockwinkel Regains The AWA Title From Otto Wanz. Also: Backlund-Graham, Rich-Sawyer, Barry Windham, Martel & Garea, McDaniel & Piper, Kamala.

May 1983: What Will Happen When The Samoans Become Too Smart For Capt. Lou Albano? Also: Tommy Rich, Terry Allen, Eddie Gilbert, Kerry-Race, Ladd & Rhodes, Flair-Orndorff.

June 1983: Flair-Windham Match Spurs Controversy: Should The NWA Champion Be Allowed To Choose His Challenger? Also: Ivan Koloff, Bruiser Brody, Kerry Von Erich, Andre-Kamala, Brazil-Valentine, Gagnes-Martel.

July 1983: Ric Flair: "I Wrestle The Men Backlund Is Afraid Of." Also: Putski-Adonis, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Roop, Martel-Heenan.

Sept. 1983: Nick Bockwinkel Forces Hulk Hogan Into Exile: And Only The Fans Can Bring Him Back. Also: Briscoes, Blackwell-Kerry-Race, Paul Ellering, Mulligan & Windham.

Nov. 1983: Target—Harley Race! Can Dusty Rhodes Fulfill His American Dream A Third Time? Also: Rick

Rude, Rotundo-Kabuki, Gagne & Brunzell, Tito Santana, Von Erichs-Freebirds.

Dec. 1983: The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

March 1984: Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.

July 1984: Tommy Rich Is Back! And He Owes It All To The Fans. Also: Valiant-Rhodes, Ric Flair, Mike Von Erich, Billy Jack.

Aug. 1984: Garvin vs. Roberts: "Hands Of Stone" Crushes "The Snake." Also: Freebirds-Devastation Inc., Sawyer-Sullivan, Lawler & Dillon, McDaniel-Race.

Nov. 1984: The \$50,000 Full-Nelson Challenge Match: Billy Jack Gets Bloody Revenge Against Superstar Graham. Also: Roddy Piper, Heenan & Sato, Brody & Hansen, Kerry Von Erich.

Dec. 1984: The Tully Blanchard-Rick Steamboat Feud: Will Dusty Rhodes End It ... Or Make It Worse? Also: Tito Santana, Martel-Atlas, D. Funk, Mike Von Erich, Williams-Taylor.

Jan. 1985: Kerry Von Erich: "I've Got Ric Flair's NWA Title Within My Grasp." Also: Albano & Lauper, Koloffs & Kernodle, Road Warriors, Lawler & Rude, Scott McGhee.

Feb. 1985: Greg Valentine Wins Tito Santana's Intercontinental Title ... But Does He Deserve To Be Champion? Also: Ronnie Garvin, Warriors-Shepherders, Flair-Billy Jack, Nikita Koloff.

April 1985: Six-Man Riot! Road Warriors & Ellering vs. Rhodes, Rich, & Anderson. Also: Tonga Kid, Tomorrow's stars, Adams-Kevin, Flair-Jack, Terminators.

May 1985: The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbowl! Also: Al-Kaissie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.

June 1985: Are The WWF Rulebreakers Singling Out Barry Windham For Destruction? Also: Zbyszko-Backlund, Rhodes-Blanchard, Tommy Rich, Oliver-Haynes.

July 1985: It's A Dog's Life ... And Junkyard Dog Wouldn't Trade It With Anyone! Also: Backlund-Martel, Kernodle-Koloff, Butch Reed, Hernandez & Sunshine, Mike Graham.

Aug. 1985: Ten Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnus T.A., Bugsy McGraw, Sheik & Volkoff-Windham & Rotundo, 20th anniversary.

Oct. 1985: David Schultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

May 1986: Von Erich Family Feud: Is Lance Coming Between Kevin And Kerry? Also: Hansen-Hall, Hill-billies-Beefcake & Valentine, Butch Reed, Santana-Ventura.

June 1986: Kerry Reveals His Secret: "I've Told Magnus T.A. How To Beat Ric Flair!" Also: Steve Williams, Hogan-Orton, Flair-Bockwinkel, Luger.

Nov. 1986: Morton & Gibson Take A Trip To Badstreet U.S.A.: The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. The Freebirds. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Hogan-Orndorff, Mike Von Erich, Mulligan-Bass.

Dec. 1986: Ric Flair's NWA Title Reign: Last Chance To Silence The Critics! Also: Nikita Koloff, Gilbert & Sting, Hogan-Piper, Abdullah-Adams, Nick Bockwinkel.

Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnus T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yorkoff, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

March 1987: Ivan & Khrushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.

June 1987: The Hart Foundation vs. The Cam-Ans: Special Analysis Of This WWF Superfeud! Also: Nick Bockwinkel, Paul Orndorff, Rhodes & Murdoch, Steve Williams.

July 1987: Missy Hyatt: Will She Kiss And Tell In The WWF? Also: Chris Adams, Hart Foundation, Luger & Horsemen, Nikita-Cornette, Stan Hansen.

Oct. 1987: The Honky Tunk Man Wins The Intercontinental Title: Is Randy Savage The Fans' Last Hope. Also: Kerry Von Erich, Ken Patera, Sting-Gilbert, Horsemen-Freebirds, Zbyszko-Gagne.

Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

Feb. 1988: Ric Flair Admits: "I'm Nothing Without The NWA Belt!" Also: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Hogan-Andre, Hennig-Lawler, Terry Taylor.

March 1988: After Four Years As Champion ... Only Hulk Hogan Can Beat Hulk Hogan. Also: Warriors-Demolition, Steve Williams, Luger & Dillon, Calgary, Terry Gordy.

May 1988: Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.

June 1988: How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

Aug. 1988: World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

Oct. 1988: The Fantastics Declare: "We Will Not Share Our Fans With The Rock 'n' Roll Express!" Also: Rhodes-Windham, Curt Hennig, Roberts-Rude, Rougeaux, Jim Garvin.

Jan. 1989: The Horsemen Destroyed! The World Title Gained! But The Midnight Express Must Still Prove Themselves! Also: Top Guns, Hart & Rougeaux, Andre-Savage-Hulk, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

March 1989: Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

April 1989: Hulkamania Runs Wild Again! Can Randy Savage Stop The Onslaught? Also: British Bulldogs, Road Warriors-Sting & Luger, Lawler-Kerry, Andre, Mike Rotundo.

June 1989: Ultimate Warrior's Mission Impossible: Destroy Randy Savage For Hulk Hogan. Also: Rick Steamboat, Rick Martel, Larry Zbyszko, Luger-Windham by Sting, Ric Flair.

July 1989: Dino Bravo: The Man Hulk Hogan Cannot Beat! Also: Flair-Steamboat, Rhodes & Perez, Road Warriors & Ellering, Michael Hayes.

Aug. 1989 (Special Edition): Supercard Sunday! Exclusive Coverage Of WrestleMania V And Clash Of Champions VI. Also: Kerry-Embry, Randy Savage, Great Muta, Ted DiBiase, Teddy Long.

Sept. 1989: Our Urgent Plea To Ric Flair: Don't Wrestle Terry Funk. Also: Demolition, Roddy Piper, Hogan-Zeus, Larry Zbyszko, Jerry Lawler.

Oct. 1989: No Holds Barred! Hogan & Beefcake vs. Savage & Zeus: An Exclusive Preview & Analysis. Also: Eric Embry, Four Horsemen, Teddy Long, Hayes-Luger, Art Barr, Billy Jack Hayes.

Nov. 1989: Roddy Piper Pins Randy Savage ... And Hulk Hogan Is Scared Stiff! Also: Mr. T & Von Erichs, Garvin & Hayes, Flair-T. Funk, Dustin-Steel Man, Sgt. Slaughter.

Jan. 1990: The Hulk Hogan Book Of Lists. Also: Brian Pillman, Rich-Luger, Tully & Arn, P.Y. Chu-Hi, Greg Gagne.

March 1990: Funk Flair: "I Quit!—One War Ends, Two More Begin. Also: Nikita Koloff, Survivor Series, Steiners, Hogan-Zeus, Jim Cornette.

April 1990: Hulk Hogan: A Decade Of Greatness. Also: Luger-Flair, Woman, Piper-Heenan, Billy Travis, Badd Company.

July 1990: My 10 Challenges To Ric Flair, By Lex Luger. Also: Lanny Poffo, Dusty-Savage, Luger-Flair, Doom, Tully Blanchard.

Aug. 1990: Hogan-Warrior II: You Can Make It Happen. Also: Eric Embry, Demolition, Doom, Larry Zbyszko.

Sept. 1990: The Ultimate Warrior Wimps Out! Why He Won't Wrestle Hulk Hogan. Also: Billy Jack Hayes, Luger, Doom-Steiners, Tugboat, Kerry-Borne.

Oct. 1990: Hulk Hogan vs. Earthquake: Exclusive SummerSlam Preview & Analysis. Also: Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, Tommy Rich, Tasmanian Devil, Chris Von Erich.

Feb. 1991: The Incredible "Halloween Havoc Hoax"! Unraveling The Diabolical Plot. Also: Muta-Steamboat, Hogan-Hart, Ultimate Warrior, Cornette & Express, Norman.

March 1991: Warning To The Ultimate Warrior: Roddy Piper Wants You! Also: Gilbert-Jarrett, Cornette & Express, Teddy Long, Survivor Series, Scott Norton.

April 1991: Hulk Hogan: The Challenges That Remain. Also: Ted DiBiase, Skyscrapers, Lex Luger, Tom Zenk, Fabulous Ones.

May 1991: Only Hulk Hogan Can Rid The WWF Of The Stench Of Sgt. Slaughter. Also: Ric Flair, Bobby Eaton, Sheik-Brazil, Power & Glory, Terry Funk.

June 1991: How Much Longer Can We Depend On Hulk Hogan? Also: Nasty Boys, Sting, Flair-Gigante, Cactus Jack, Kevin Von Erich.

July 1991: Can Ric Flair Shatter The "Myth" Of Japanese Superiority? Also: Embry & Prichard, LOD-Nastys, Steiners, Savage & Elizabeth.

Aug. 1991: If Sgt. Slaughter Said "I'm Sorry" ... Would Hulk And The World Forgive Him? Also: Luger-Nikita, Hennig-Davey Boy, Lanny Poffo, Bam Bam Bigelow.

Nov. 1991: Lex Luger Wins The Title—But Loses His Fans. Also: Rick Steamboat, Roddy Piper, Global, Diamond Studd, Lawler-Embry.

Dec. 1991: Roddy Piper's Exclusive Analysis: Flair vs. Hogan—Who Will Win The Match Of The Century? Also: Sting, 25 greatest teams, Beverly, Cactus Jack.

Jan. 1992: The LOD's Championship Catastrophe: Overpowered By The Natural Disasters. Also: Johnny B. Badd, Mr. Hughes, Jake Roberts, Ronnie Gossett.

Feb. 1992: Shocking WWF Report: McMahon Offers Bounty On Flair—Will Vince Pay The Payout? Also: Ron Simmons, Tito Santana, Bob Backlund, R. Steiner-Abdullah.

March 1992: After Survivor Series & Tuesday In Texas: Has The WWF Title Suffered Irreparable Damage? Also: Brian Pillman, Anderson & Bruiser, Rude-Sting, Mountie-Hell, Jeff Jarrett.

April 1992: After A Year Of Tragedy & Turmoil: The Maple Is Back In WCW! Also: Chris Candido, Paul Orndorff, Lady X, Paul Bearer, Hennig & Flair, Michaels & Jannetty.

Dec. 1992: He's Baaaaack! Jake Roberts Slithers Into WCW. Also: Paul E. Dangerously, Ron Simmons, Hulk Hogan, Michaels-Martel, Gilberts-Rick 'n' Rols.

May 1992: He Rumbled Past 29 Men ... Ric Flair's Hour Of Power: Can One Man Stop Him At WrestleMania VII? Also: Anderson & Eaton, Roddy Piper, Dusty Rhodes, USWA, Don Owen.

June 1992: In Ric Flair's High-Stakes Championship Game, Hulk Hogan & Sid Justice Are Mere Pawns. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Ultimate Warrior, Vinnie Vegas, WCW titles, Koko B. Ware.

July 1992: "Number Two Just Won't Do": For Rick Rude, The U.S. Belt Means Failure. Also: Madusa, Gorilla, Monsoon, LOD, Nurse Vanessa, Greg Valentine, Sabu.

Aug. 1992: The Ultimate Warrior: WrestleMania's Accidental Hero. Also: Bunkhouse matches, Undertaker-Roberts, Sting, JYD, Rob Van Dam.

Sept. 1992: Hey, Legion Of Doom—Go For The Title Or Go Away! Also: Repo-Crush, Mondo Kleen, Freebirds-Valentine & Taylor, Dangerous Alliance, MoonDogs.

Oct. 1992: British Bulldog & Ultimate Warrior: Why They'll Be Crowned At SummerSlam. Also: Scotty Flamingo, Brian Lee, Martel-Tatanka, Steve Austin, Sting.

Nov. 1992: WWF Beware! It's The Perfect Time For A Curt Hennig Comeback! Also: Crush, Butch Reed, Sting, Buddy Rogers, Dan Spivey.

Jan. 1993: Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-MoonDogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.

Feb. 1993: WWF Champion Bret Hart: His Five Most Dangerous Challenges. Also: Sgt. Slaughter, Steve Austin, Rick Steiner, Bob Backlund, Terry Taylor.

March 1993 (Special Edition): 1992—The Year In Pictures. Also: Madusa-Paul E. Curt Hennig, Davey Boy Smith, Jesse Ventura, Predictions For '93.

April 1993: What's In? What's Out? Also: Razor Ramon, Rick Steamboat, Patriot, Tatanka, Brian Christopher.

May 1993: Sumo Sadism: Will Yokozuna Make His Biggest Splash At WrestleMania? Also: Jim Cornette, Christopher-Jarrett, Benoit-Scorpio, Windham & Rhodes, Hennig-Luger.

Nov. 1993: Bret Hart vs. Lex Luger: It's Not Over Yet! Also: Rude-Dustin, Hulk Hogan, Marty Jannetty, Heavenly Bodies, Tatanka, Sherri Martel.

Jan. 1994: Roast, Broiled, Fried, Baked ... Any Way You Cook It, Hogan's A Chicken! Also: Rude-Flair, Bagwell & Scorpio, Jim Cornette, Jerry Lawler, Hansen & T. Funk-Abdullah & Sullivan.

May 1994: Aftershocks! How The Royal Rumble Shook Up Wrestling! Also: Hulk Hogan, Boss, Douglas-Sherri, Patriot, Improve WCW.

July 1994: Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan: We Preview The Inevitable Battle. Also: Dreamer-Snuka, Jim Crockett's WWN, Ted DiBiase, Shane Douglas, Terra Ryzing.

Aug. 1994: Bret's Nightmare Team Becomes A Reality: Owen Hart & Yokozuna. Also: Cactus-Vader, MOM, Flair-Badd, Nasty Boys, Luna Vachon.

Sept. 1994 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report! Also: Big Van Vader, Parker-Hollywood Blonds, Sting-Rude, WWF legal problems, Prince Kharis, Bunkhouse-Rhodes, Public Enemy.

Jan. 1995: Our Holiday Wish List For 1995. Also: Johnny B. Badd, DiBiase-Tatanka, Bob Backlund, PG-13, Hacksaw Duggan.

March 1995 (Special Issue): 1994—The Year In Pictures. Also: Sullivan-Hogan-Sullivan, WWF '95-WWF '85, Ric Flair, MOM, 911.

April 1995: Imagine Wrestling Today If ... Also: Gunn & Smothers, Harlem Heat, Money Inc., Lawler-Cornette.

May 1994: Aftershocks! How The Royal Rumble Shook Up Wrestling! Also: Big Bossman, Sherri-Douglas, Hulk Hogan, The Patriot.

July 1995: Hulk Hogan's Contract With America. Also: Marty Jannetty, Brian Pillman, Lawrence Taylor, Bill Dundee.

Oct. 1995: President Backlund? Also: Steiners, Austin & Pillman, Miss Texas, Gordon Solie.

Nov. 1995: If Savage Can't Silence Flair, He's Through! Also: Jarrett-Ramon, Mabel, Hogan & Renegade, WWF legends roundtable.

Dec. 1995 (Special Issue): Shawn Michaels: Too Good To Be Second Best! Also: Wrestling rulebook, Vega-Ramon, Mama Cornette, Kamala-Duggan, Big Van Vader.

Winter 1995: Exclusive Preview: Sting vs. Hogan: This Time It's For Real! Also: Steiners, Yankem-Undertaker, Bodies-Cornette, Arn Anderson.

May 1996: WWF In-Vader! Can Bret, Shawn, & Razor Play The Pain Game? Also: Public Enemy, Steve Austin, wrestling oddities, Kensuke Sasaki, Ric Flair.

June 1996 (Special Issue): Fear Of Height! How The Giant Is Paralyzing Wrestling. Also: Shock 'n' Wrestling, Razor Ramon, Brian Pillman, Konnan.

Aug. 1996: Shawn Michaels: Finally—He Has The Title ... Now Here's What He's Gotta Do With It! Also: Public Enemy-Nastys, Bret Hart, Booty Man-Sullivan, Mabel.

Sept. 1996 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: Savio Vega, Sabu-Scorpio, Chris Benoit, Goldust, Olympians, Giant.

Oct. 1996: Muscling Back To The Top: The Warrior Is Ready To Rule Again. Also: Warriors & Sasaki-

Steiners & Norton, Razor & Diesel, Mabel & Mo, Blue Meanie.

Nov. 1996: Brian Pillman: Next WWF Champ! Also: Giant-Sting, Ray Stevens, Dick Murdoch, Cloudy, John Tenta, WCW shuffle.

Dec. 1996 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: Ahmed Johnson, Ric Flair, Mero & Sable, Goldust, Sandman.

Holiday 1996: WCW Shocker: Randy Savage Is Set To Join Hulk Hogan's NWO! Also: Steve Austin, Michaels-Goldust, Arn Anderson, Van Dam-Sabu, Steve Williams.

Jan. 1997: It Could Happen! Hogan's Next Move ... Buy WCW! Also: Undertaker, New Jack, Owen-Bodog, Ted DiBiase.

Feb. 1997: Wrestling's Top Stars: What 1997 Has In Store For Them! Also: Michaels-Hart, Pit Bull I, Rey Mysterio Jr., Kevin Nash.

July 1997: Infiltrating, Politics, Egos: Is The NWO Losing Its Edge? Also: WWF-ECW, Dean Malenko, Super 8 tourney, Jerry Lawler.

Oct. 1997: Bret Hart & Shawn Michaels: How Low Will They Go? Also: Paul E. Dangerously, DDP & Kimberly, Rhodes family, Keiji Muto.

Nov. 1997: 10-Year Grudge! Lex Luger's Career Ruined By J.J. Dillon? Also: Shawn-Bret, Jeff Jarrett, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn.

Dec. 1997 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: Guerreros, Taz, Syxx, Paul Bearer, Brian Christopher.

Hol. 1997: First Owen ... Then 'Taker ... Then Hogan: Who's Gonna Go Next? Also: Steve Austin, Bret Hart, Lex Luger, Ric Flair, Dean Malenko.

April 1998: "We've Won!" Maybe ... But Can The NWO Handle Its Own Success? Also: Ken Shamrock, Steiners-Warriors, Douglas & Francine, Rocky Maivia.

May 1998: Mike Tyson: Stepping Into Wrestling Hell! Also: Bischoff-Bret-Zbyszko, Meng & Barbarian, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, ECWA ladder match.

June 1998: Hollywood Hogan: 10 More Dirty Deeds ... And Then He's Outta Here! Also: DeGeneration X, Jim Cornette, Randy Savage, yesterday and today.

July 1998: Death Wish! Costing Hogan The Title Isn't Enough For The Macho Man: What's Next? Also: Ric Flair, Headbangers-Rock 'n' Rolls, Chris Chetti, Mero & Sable.

Aug. 1998: We Stand Behind Ya, Vince! It's Time To Fire Austin. Also: Luna-Sable, Randy Savage, Dean Malenko, Super 8 tourney.

Sept. 1998 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: Nash-Hogan, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg, Antonio Inoki.

Oct. 1998: The Mother Of All Pay-Per-Views! A WWF-WCW Supercard Is No Longer Just Talk! Also: Sable, Undertaker, Randy Savage, Sabu & Van Dam.

Nov. 1998: Demons Be Damned! Sting Makes The Giant See Red! Also: McMahon-Dude, Jarrett-Blackman, Melanie Pillman, Rey Mysterio Jr.

Dec. 1998 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: ECW midyear report, Ric Flair, Kane.

Hol. 1998: "Quit, Mick!" A Desperate Plea From A Distraught Wife. Also: Chris Jericho, Jason Sensation, wrestlers vs. celebrities, hardcore war.

Jan. 1999: Stone-Cold's Personal Survivor Series. Also: Rock-HHH, NWA, Bret Hart, Howard Finkel, three-way title matches.

Feb. 1999: Hot Rocks! The Anger That Drives Shamrock & The Rock. Also: McMahon-Austin, Spike Dudley, Eric Bischoff, Perry Saturn.

March 1999 (Special Issue): 1998—The Year In Pictures. Also: Hall & Nash, Goldust, Mr. Ooh La La, The Undertaker.

April 1999: Hogan's Retirement: White House Or White Lie? Also: DDP-Hart, Taz-Douglas, Steve Austin, Mankind.

May 1999: Team Coverage: The NWO Reunion! Also: Kane-McMahon, Dallas Page, Funk-Abdullah, WWF sideshow.

June 1999 (Special Issue): Ric Flair: The 10 Feats He Must Accomplish Before He's Through. Also: Rocky Maivia, Juventud Guerrera, Billy Gunn, body parts quiz section.

July 1999: Our Bottom Line ... It's High Time Austin Shows McMahon Respect! Also: Jerry Lawler, Rey Mysterio Jr., Ken Shamrock, DDP-Bigelow-Goldberg.

Aug. 1999: This Man Is Pure Evil! Trust Hogan And He'll Take You To Hell! Plus: Owen Hart, Vader, Sable.

Sept. 1999 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: DDP-Sting, Douglas-Credible, Big Show-McMahons, Disco Inferno, Keim & Lane.

Oct. 1999: Shawn Michaels' Game Of Corporate Chess! Are The McMahons His Pawns? Also: Steiners, Billy Gunn, Savage & George.

Nov. 1999: Austin's New Powers: Shag Vince? Yeah, Baby! Also: Arn-Sid, Hardy Boys, Ernest Miller, Naoya Ogawa.

Dec. 1999 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: ECW midyear report, David & Ric Flair, Test & Stephanie.

Hol. 1999: Before The WWF Can Sell ... Read What They Had To Tell! Also: Kanyon, Big Show, Spike & Mahoney-Axl & New Jack, Kevin Nash.

Jan. 2000: An Insider's Analysis: Why The Guys Can't Handle Chyna. Also: Revolution, ECW expansion, Guerrero & Mysterio, WWF/WCW/ECW women.

Feb. 2000: When Will Mankind Finally Tell The Rock ... "Put A Sock In It"? Also: Goldberg, Chris Jericho, Sabu, Harlem Heat.

Apr. 2000: Can The WWF Survive Without Steve Austin? Also: Dawn Marie-Francine, Meng, Big Show, Madusa.

May 2000: StePHONY: The Most Mistrusted McMahon Of All! Also: Harlem Heat & Midnight, David & Ric Flair, Kurt Angle, Rhino.

June 2000 (Special Issue): The Rock: No. 1 On The Jabroni Hit List! Also: Awesome-Van Dam, Kurt Angle, Vampiro, federation jumpers, book of lists.

July 2000: Tori/Torrie, What's The Story? How They Rank In 10 Crucial Categories. Also: Big Show, Tank Abbott, Too Cool, Rhodes-Dreamer, Jeff Jarrett.

Aug. 2000: We're Con-Vinced! This Attack Saved The WWF! Also: Lex Luger, Radicals, Sandman & Rhino, Cyrus.

Sept. 2000 (Special Issue): WWF Mid-Year Report. Also: Mike Awesome, Nova & Chetti, Paul Wight, Chyna, Dr. Sam Sheppard.

Oct. 2000: Is Chyna Robbing Eddie Of His Latino Heat? Also: Abbott-Steiner, Scotty Too Hotty, Rob Van Dam, David Flair.

Nov. 2000: Special Fear Issue—Rock-Benoit, Ric Flair, HBK. Also: ECW mid-year report, Bill Goldberg.

Dec. 2000 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: Goldberg-Trip-H, Daffney, Christian & Edge, Jeff Peterson.

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Jan. 2001: WWF Brat-titude! Does Steph Always Get Her Way? Not On Your Life! Also: Lance Storm, Mick Foley, Goldberg, Steve Corino, Steve Blackman, Torrie Wilson.

March 2001: Triple-H & The Rock: 10 Reasons They Should Trust Each Other ... 10 Reasons They Should Not! Also: Scott Steiner, Chris Candido, Rob Van Dam, McMahon-ECW, Steven Richards, WCW factions.

May 2001: Do Anything You Want, Stone-Cold: We Can't Hate You. Also: Kronik, Rikishi, Steve Corino, Goldberg, Edge & Christian, Kane.

July 2001: Jericho/Chols Beware! Serious Withdrawal Symptoms Are In Store! Also: Tajiri, Steph-Test, Undertaker, Mike Awesome, WCW Elite, Albert.

Sept. 2001: The Rock's Choice: Honor Over Glory! Also: WrestleMania X-Seven, Undertaker-Trip-H, Shane-WCW, T.C.I. II, Scott Hall, Vince McMahon, Chris Jericho.

Nov. 2001: Goldberg! Da Man Who Could Make Or Break Wrestling! Also: Dudley's, Steve Corino, Chris Benoit, Dusty Rhodes, Lita, WWF top tier.

Jan. 2002: Can The Rock Handle The Unrelenting Pressure Of Fame? Also: RVD, Paul Heyman, Terry Gordy, Flash-Jericho, Tajiri-Taz, WWF-Alliance.

March 2002: Outsiders Looking In! Hall & Nash Take Aim At The WWF! Also: Ivory, Austin-Angle, Christian-Edge, what's ahead in '02.

May 2002: Ric Flair: 10 Reasons He Terrifies Vince McMahon. Also: Undertaker, Jeff Hardy, Survivor Series, S.A.T., report cards.

July 2002: Hall The NWO ... But Don't Forget The N-W-Woes! Also: Edge, Billy & Chuck, Leviathan, Jericho-Flair, Goldust.

Sept. 2002: What's Left? Hulk Hogan's Five Remaining Tasks. Also: Steve Austin, Kurt Angle, Rey Mysterio Jr., Jeff Peterson, WWF draft.

Nov. 2002: Who's Next? The Stars That Could Replace Stone-Cold. Also: Torrie Wilson, Davey Boy Smith, Ken Shamrock, Funk-Abdullah-Rhodes-Sullivan, WWE shockers, indy roulette.

Jan. 2003: War Games! WWE Is Out Of Control ... And Vinnie Mac Loves It! Also: Rey Mysterio Jr., A.J. Styles, Rikishi-Gangrel, The Rock, Christian.

March 2003: The WrestleMania XIX We Want To See! Also: Terry Funk, Rey Mysterio Jr., Nidia, NWA-TNA, what's ahead in '03.

May 2003: A Permanent Replacement For The Rock? Book It! Also: Smackdown, Joanie & Syxx-Pac, Raw report cards, Shawn Michaels, Victoria.

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Wrestler^{the}

TOP 10

- 1 BROCK LESNAR**
295, Minneapolis, MN
(1) WWE Smackdown champion
- 2 TRIPLE-H**
269, Greenwich, CT
(2) WWE Raw champion
- 3 KENTA KOBASHI**
282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
(3) GHC heavyweight champion
- 4 A.J. STYLES**
202, Gainesville, GA
(-) NWA heavyweight champion
- 5 KURT ANGLE**
233, Pittsburgh, PA
(-) No. 1 contender: WWE Smackdown title
- 6 YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA**
270, Sapporo, Japan
(6) IWGP heavyweight champion
- 7 KANE**
326, St. Louis, MO
(-) No. 1 contender: WWE Raw title
- 8 BOOKER T**
250, Houston, TX
(8) WWE Intercontinental champion
- 9 SHINYA HASHIMOTO**
287, Gifu, Japan
(10) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
- 10 THE BIG SHOW**
485, Aiken, SC
(9) No. 2 contender: WWE Smackdown title



Chris Harris & James Storm

TAG TEAMS

- 1 RENE DUPREE & SYLVAN GRENIER**
Combined weight: 504 pounds
(-) WWE Raw tag team champions
- 2 SHELTON BENJAMIN & CHARLIE HAAS**
Combined weight: 510 pounds
(1) WWE Smackdown tag team champions
- 3 MASA CHONO & HIROYOSHI TENZAN**
Combined weight: 505 pounds
(3) IWGP International tag team champions
- 4 CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM**
Combined weight: 516 pounds
(-) NWA tag team champions
- 5 KEIJI MUTO & ARASHI**
Combined weight: 471 pounds
(-) All-Japan International tag team champions
- 6 BUH BUH RAY & D-VON DUDLEY**
Combined weight: 579 pounds
(7) No. 1 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
- 7 CHRIS BENOIT & RHYNO**
Combined weight: 499 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
- 8 TAMON HONDA & KENTA KOBASHI**
Combined weight: 547 pounds
(-) GHC tag team champions
- 9 THE BASHAM BROTHERS**
Combined weight: 492 pounds
(-) No. 2 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
- 10 BRADSHAW & FAAROOQ**
Combined weight: 582 pounds
(-) No. 3 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title

WWE RAW

Raw Champion:

TRIPLE-H

(C) 269, Greenwich, CT

- 1-KANE**
(-) 326, St. Louis, MO
- 2-BOOKER T**
(2) 250, Houston, TX
- 3-ROB VAN DAM**
(8) 237, Battle Creek, MI
- 4-BILL GOLDBERG**
(3) 283, Tulsa, OK
- 5-RANDY ORTON**
(-) 265, St. Louis, MO
- 6-CHRISTIAN**
(9) 225, Toronto, Ontario
- 7-CHRIS JERICO**
(4) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 8-KEVIN NASH**
(1) 303, Detroit, MI
- 9-SCOTT STEINER**
(5) 275, Detroit, MI
- 10-TEST**
(7) 282, Toronto, Ontario

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown Champion:

BROCK LESNAR

(C) 295, Minneapolis, MN

- 1-KURT ANGLE**
(-) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
- 2-THE BIG SHOW**
(2) 485, Aiken, SC
- 3-JOHN CENA**
(1) 260, Los Angeles, CA
- 4-REY MISTERIO JR.**
(10) 163, San Diego, CA
- 5-CHRIS BENOIT**
(3) 224, Edmonton, Alberta
- 6-BILLY GUNN**
(-) 268, Austin, TX
- 7-THE UNDERTAKER**
(-) 304, Dallas, TX
- 8-EDDIE GUERRERO**
(-) 223, El Paso, TX
- 9-MATT HARDY**
(4) 220, Cameron, NC
- 10-RHYNO**
(6) 275, Detroit, MI

OVW

OVW Champion:

DOUG BASHAM

(C) 241, Louisville, KY

- 1-DAMAJA**
(2) 251, Seymour, IN
- 2-JOHN JETER**
(3) 218, San Diego, CA
- 3-NICK DINSMORE**
(1) 226, Jefferson, IN
- 4-ROB CONWAY**
(5) 240, Pittsburgh, PA
- 5-MATT MORGAN**
(4) 330, Fairfield, CT
- 6-MARK HENRY**
(-) 372, Austin, TX
- 7-MARK MAGNUS**
(-) 231, Syracuse, NY
- 8-BANE**
(-) 285, Tombstone, AZ
- 9-CHRIS CAGE**
(-) 220, Youngstown, OH
- 10-RENE DUPREE**
(9) 250, Montreal, Quebec

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:

SAMOA JOE

(C) 270, American Samoa

- 1-PAUL LONDON**
(3) 201, Austin, TX
- 2-C.M. PUNK**
(5) 220, Chicago, IL
- 3-CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
(2) 210, Los Angeles, CA
- 4-A.J. STYLES**
(6) 202, Gainesville, GA
- 5-B.J. WHITMER**
(-) 210, Owensboro, KY
- 6-MATT STRYKER**
(10) 220, Cincinnati, OH
- 7-LOW-KI**
(4) 170, Brooklyn, NY
- 8-RAVEN**
(7) 243, Short Hills, NJ
- 9-RED**
(-) 147, Brooklyn, NY
- 10-JEFF HARDY**
(-) 216, Cameron, NC

OFFICIAL RATINGS

op 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

For period ended July 13, 2003

WWE STAR WRESTLING: **Champion**—Spazman Anthony; 1—Rockin' Rebel; 2—Jack Hammer; 3—The Doc; 4—Greg Matthews; 5—Tommy Hawk; 6—Rikki Lane; 7—Labbie; 8—American Jackass; 9—Mike Lawson; 10—Bill Bain.

WWE ALL STAR PRO WRESTLING: **Champion**—Ricky Jackson; 1—JPW; 2—Scott Phoenix; 3—Mace; 4—Max Muscles; 5—Seth Shai; 6—Chuck Murphy; 7—Keats Douglas; 8—Enigma; 9—Wade Walker; 10—Darin Childs.

WWE CENTRAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: **Champion**—Larry D; 1—Jad T. Lungini; 2—Mongoose; 3—Terry Alan; 4—Bo Johnson; 5—Syxe; 6—Cujo; 7—Redneck Superstar; 8—J.T. Money; 9—Maddawg; 10—Payne.

WWE CHIKARA: **Champion**—Hallowicked; 1—Mike Quackenbush; 2—Blind Rage; 3—UltraMantis; 4—Mister ZERO; 5—Chris Hero; 6—Eddie Kingston; 7—Jack Marciano; 8—Gran Akuma; 9—Ares; 10—Double C.

WWE INDEPENDENT CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: **Champion**—Marc Ash; 1—Lotus; 2—Duke Richards; 3—Dark Star; 4—J. Marcus Lawson; 5—Lex Reed; 6—Ivan Koloff; 7—Tre G; 8—John Thundercloud; 9—Hangtime; 10—Dave Renegade.

WWE INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATION: **Champion**—Fred Sampson; 1—Kevin Knight; 2—Roman; 3—Hadrian; 4—Biggie Biggs; 5—The Patriot; 6—Shawn Donovan; 7—Brandon Young; 8—Mikhail Verow; 9—Shane O'Brien; 10—Tommy Trouble.

INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING CARTEL: **Champion**—Dennis Gregory; 1—Colt Cabana; 2—Matt Stryker; 3—Shirley Doe; 4—Super Hentai; 5—T. Rantula; 6—D-Lo Brown; 7—Sterling James Keenan; 8—Al B. Damm; 9—Bubba the Bulldog; 10—Dean Radford.

IPW Hardcore Wrestling: **Champion**—Billy Fives; 1—Lex Lovett; 2—Scoot Andrews; 3—Rod Steel; 4—Norman Smiley; 5—Agent Steele; 6—Punisher; 7—Mike Sullivan; 8—Navy Seal; 9—Danny Doring; 10—Gangrel.

MIDWEST POWERHOUSE WRESTLING: **Champion**—Dan Severn; 1—Damien Blade; 2—Christian Haze; 3—The Searcher; 4—Guy Smith; 5—Hollywood Stud; 6—Chico Es Loco; 7—Agent C; 8—Yingish Yang; 9—Agent U; 10—Gary Michael G.

TRANS WORLD WRESTLING ALLIANCE: **Champion**—Skeeter McCoy; 1—Disco Inferno; 2—Demolition Ax; 3—The Patriot; 4—Doink the Clown; 5—Johnny Graham; 6—Saboth; 7—Rob Eckos; 8—Dave Patera; 9—Shane Shadows; 10—Johnny Greco.

ULTIMATE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: **Champion**—Gary Gold; 1—Travis Funk; 2—Gino Martino; 3—Tony Atlas; 4—Chris Blackheart; 5—Iceburg; 6—The Widowmaker; 7—Paulie Gilmore; 8—Robbie Ellis; 9—Moose Monroe; 10—Cueball.

WORLD CLASS EXTREME WRESTLING: **Champion**—The Stro; 1—Aaron Devil; 2—David Young; 3—Malaki; 4—Steve Michaels; 5—The Barbarian; 6—Deacon; 7—Tyrone Knox; 8—The Big Law Man; 9—Randy B. Studdly; 10—Mo Money.

IWA

IWA Champion:

A.J. STYLES

(2) 202, Gainesville, GA

1—JEFF JARRETT

(C) 230, Nashville, TN

2—HOTSTUFF HERNANDEZ

(1) 280, Houston, TX

3—D-LO BROWN

(-) 281, Chicago, IL

4—RAVEN

(-) 243, Short Hills, NJ

5—RICKY MURDOCH

(2) 261, Houston, TX

6—STEVE CORINO

(5) 219, Sea Isle City, NJ

7—BRIAN JEWEL

(-) 265, Shediac, New Brunswick

8—KEVIN NORTHCUTT

(10) 348, Chalmette, LA

9—JOHNNY MOSS

(6) 240, Egremont, England

0—BILLY FIVES

(9) 222, Cherokee, NC

NWA-TNA

NWA Champion:

A.J. STYLES

(5) 202, Gainesville, GA

1—CHRIS SABIN

(-) 207, Hell, MI

2—JEFF JARRETT

(C) 230, Nashville, TN

3—D-LO BROWN

(6) 281, Chicago, IL

4—FRANKIE KAZARIAN

(-) 220, Yucca Valley, CA

5—RAVEN

(3) 243, Short Hills, NJ

6—KID KASH

(4) 202, Johnson City, TN

7—JERRY LYNN

(7) 216, Minneapolis, MN

8—JUSTIN CREDIBLE

(-) 227, Waterbury, CT

9—THE SANDMAN

(-) 244, Philadelphia, PA

10—SHANE DOUGLAS

(-) 255, Pittsburgh, PA

JAPAN

1—KENTA KOBASHI

(1) 282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

2—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA

(2) 270, Sapporo, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion

3—SHINYA HASHIMOTO

(3) 287, Gifu, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown champion

4—KEIJI MUTO

(4) 245, Yamanashi, Japan

5—TIGER MASK IV

(9) 170, Uruyasu, Japan

6—YUJI NAGATA

(8) 228, Tokyo, Japan

7—MASA CHONO

(5) 235, Tokyo, Japan

8—KENDO KA SHIN

(10) 195, Tokyo, Japan

9—KOJI KANEMOTO

(-) 205, Osaka, Japan

10—MITSU HARU MISAWA

(6) 228, Ashikaga, Japan

MEXICO

1—EL HIJO DEL SANTO

(10) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico

2—SHOCKER

(7) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico

3—DR. WAGNER JR.

(9) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

4—BLACK TIGER

(-) 193, Mexico City, Mexico

5—MR. NIEBLA

(1) 185, Cuatitlan, Mexico

6—UNIVERSO DOS MIL

(4) 240, Mexico City, Mexico

7—HECTOR GARZA

(2) 220, Monterrey, Mexico

8—LA PARKA

(8) 235, Torreón, Mexico

9—VAMPIRO

(-) 220, Thunder Bay, Ontario

10—ULTIMO GUERRERO

(-) 173, Mexico City, Mexico



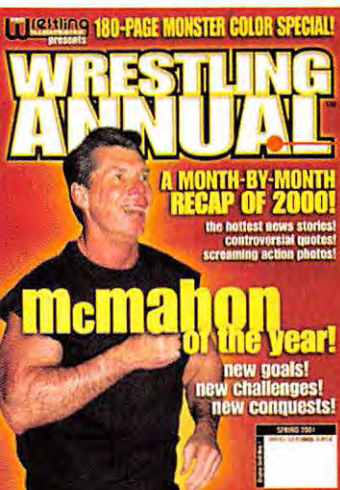
WOW[®] Remember Them?

The facial resemblance really is striking, especially around the eye area. If you were a WWF fan in the 1980s, you'll surely recognize the man in the cowboy hat as "Cowboy" Bob Orton Jr., father of current WWE star Randy Orton. Ironically, while Randy has had trouble gathering momentum in his WWE career because of the injury bug, his father used to wear a bogus cast to the ring, claiming he needed it to protect an injured arm. Of course he'd use it as a weapon every time a referee turned his back on him. The man with him here was one of the great managers in WWE history, the flamboyant Grand Wizard. The Wiz, Freddie Blassie, and Capt. Lou Albano were the "Big Three" heel managers in the company in the early-1980s. Wizard died of a heart attack at age 54 in 1983.

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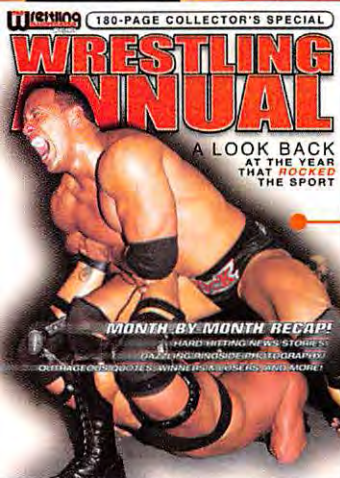
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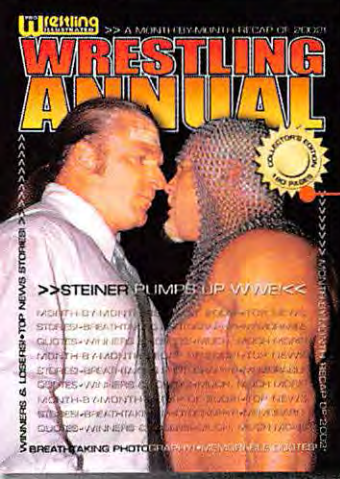
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